

Practical
Observations

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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

Increase of Infidelity.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L.L.D. F.R.S.
Esq. Esq.

THE THIRD EDITION.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

ANIMADVERSIONS

ON THE

Writings of several modern Unbelievers,

AND ESPECIALLY THE

RUINS OF Mr. VOLNEY.

L'Esprit peu penetrant se tient volontiers a la surface des choses. Il n'aime pas a les creuser, parce qu'il redoute le travail et la peine. Quelquefois il redoute plus encore la Verité.

BONNET.

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THE PREFACE.

THESE observations on the causes of the great progress which infidelity has lately made, and is still making, and which were originally prefixed to the American Edition of my *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France*, I have here much enlarged, and printed separately. Indeed, they are more proper for the perusal of *christians* than of *unbelievers*; being more immediately calculated to give them satisfaction with respect to a prospect which must continually present itself to their minds, and which cannot but at first view appear a very melancholy one. I shall think myself happy if I be able in this work to address myself to believers, or in
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my other writings to unbelievers, with propriety and effect.

If I be asked why I write so much as I do on the subject of the *evidences of christianity* (for many of my publications relate to it) I answer, that both its infinite importance, and the extraordinary crisis of the times, call for it, from every person who conceives that he has any prospect of being heard and attended to. There is no subject whatever with respect to which I am more fully satisfied myself; and few persons, I imagine, will pretend that they have given so much attention to it as I have done. It does not, however, follow from this circumstance, that I have viewed it in every possible light; and, that others may not discover, what I have overlooked. I have therefore wished to promote the most free and open discussion of it, and have not failed to invite, nay, to provoke, this examination on every proper occasion.

When, however, we have done all that we can, we must leave the event to
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a wise providence, whose instruments we are, and which has, no doubt, the best ends to answer both by the promulgation of christianity, and the present remarkable progress of infidelity. And, believing this, we should not, after doing what we conceive to be our duty, make ourselves unhappy, though, influenced as we necessarily are, by the objects that are nearest to us, it must give pain to every zealous christian to see so many persons, for whose intellectual and moral improvement he is concerned, and especially his near friends and relations, carried away by the torrent, which he sees to sweep before it every principle that he feels to be most valuable and useful to himself; leaving them mere worldly minded beings, instead of heavenly minded, bounding their prospects by the grave, when his own most pleasing prospects are beyond it.

When I read the scriptures, in which I have encreasing satisfaction as I advance in life, the animating accounts which there abound of the perfections and providence of

of God, extending to all the affairs of individual men, as well as those of states and kingdoms, and especially the glorious prospects that are there given us of the future state of things in the world, with respect to the great events which seem now to be approaching, and the light that is thrown over the state beyond the grave, so encouraging to every virtuous endeavour, I cannot help wishing that all persons might partake with me in them, and I feel the most sensible concern for those who cannot do it. Unbelievers cannot have the solid consolation that christians have under all the troubles of life, especially those that are endured for the sake of a good conscience, arising from the persuasion that *all things are working together for his good*, if not here, yet assuredly hereafter. Least of all can the unbeliever, at the approach of death, sing the triumphant song of the christian, *O grave where is thy victory, O death where is thy sting*.

A zealous christian may also be allowed to lament his own situation, when destitute
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of christian society, having none to converse with on subjects infinitely more interesting to him than any others. And it is the communication of similar sentiments, that constitutes the principal charm of society. This we find with respect to all subjects, in which men feel any interest; and on this account persons of similar principles, in politics, philosophy, &c. &c. chuse to resort together, forming clubs, and various modes of associating, for that purpose. No man can long enjoy a state of warfare, in arms or opinions, and least of all in advancing years. Then, at least, we naturally wish to be at our ease, and both to speak, and to hear what we know will give pleasure. Unbelievers also feel themselves most at their ease in the society of persons like themselves, when they can revile christianity, and ridicule the scriptures, without contradiction or any fear of giving offence.

Besides, the knowledge we have of human nature, and human life, may justly lead us to suspect the want of similar society

ciety to confirm our principles. The influence of the company we keep is great, though, by operating gradually, it is often unperceived at the time. In consequence of this, however, the best principles may be undermined, and the worst infused, before we are aware. Good men cannot themselves tell how much they owe to one another in this respect. Where external influence operates powerfully against any set of principles, great and voluntary exertions (of the necessity of which many persons will not be sufficiently aware) must be used to keep them up.

I wish it were possible for me to convey to my philosophical unbelieving friends the feeling I have of the value of christianity, a value which is enhanced by the experience of a pretty long and various life, in which christian principles have been of the most substantial use to me both in prosperity and in adversity; and as they have supported me through life, they will, I doubt not, afford consolation in the hour of death. But it is not in the power of language

language to express all that I feel on this subject. Such complex feelings as I wish to communicate have been formed by associations that have been accumulating in a long series of events, and reflections; in reading, thinking, and conversation, &c. so that a man must have lived in a great measure as I have lived, and consequently have felt what I have felt, before he can be impressed as I am with the language appropriated to religion, and especially the language of the scriptures. What impresses me with the deepest reverence would be heard by many with indifference, or contempt.

My reader may make an experiment, as it were, on his own feelings by attending to the prayer of Jesus in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel, and the language of Paul in those epistles which he wrote from Rome a short time before his death.

But, animating and encouraging as their language is to those who, like Jesus and Paul, have in some measure devoted their lives, and employed their best talents, to
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the same great purposes, it cannot be felt, and will be but imperfectly conceived, by others. Some persons, however, who have not taken their place in the *seat of the scorner*, if their early education has not been very unfavourable, and especially if they have been so happy as to have met with disappointments in life, may conceive that there is something enviable in the state of mind in which their language could be adopted.

As the language of scripture will be uncouth to most unbelievers, who are little acquainted with it, I shall, for the sake of my philosophical friends, who cannot but approve, and admire, *Hartley's Theory of the mind*, but who content themselves with studying his first volume, quote two passages from his second, the beginning and the close of it; hoping that, if they be not wholly destitute of serious impressions, prejudiced as they may be against religion, they will perceive something great, and truly valuable, in the feelings of a man who could write as he does.

‘ Whatever

‘ Whatever be our doubts, fears,
‘ or anxieties, whether selfish or social,
‘ whether for time or eternity, our only
‘ hope and refuge must be in the infinite
‘ power, knowledge, and goodness of God.
‘ And if these be really our hope and re-
‘ fuge, if we have a true practical sense
‘ and conviction of God’s infinite ability
‘ and readiness, to protect and bless us, an
‘ entire peaceful and happy resignation
‘ will be the result, notwithstanding the
‘ clouds and perplexities wherewith we
‘ may sometimes be encompassed. He who
‘ has brought us into this state will con-
‘ duct us through it. He knows all our
‘ wants and distresses. His infinite nature
‘ will bear down all opposition from our
‘ impotence, ignorance, vice, or misery.
‘ He is our creator, judge and king, our
‘ friend, and father, and God. And though
‘ the transcendent greatness and glorious-
‘ ness of this prospect may at first view
‘ make our faith stagger, and incline us
‘ to disbelieve through joy; yet, upon far-
‘ ther consideration, it seems rather to
‘ confirm

‘ confirm and establiſh itſelf on that ac-
‘ count. For the more it exceeds our
‘ gratitude and comprehension, the more
‘ does it coincide with the idea of that
‘ abſolutely perfect Being, which the ſe-
‘ veral orders of imperfect beings perpe-
‘ tually ſuggeſt to us, as our only reſting
‘ place, the cauſes of cauſes, and the ſu-
‘ preme reality.’

He concludes his great work as follows,
‘ I have now gone through with my ob-
‘ ſervations on the frame, duty and expecta-
‘ tions of man; finiſhing them with the doc-
‘ trine of ultimate unlimited happineſs to
‘ all. This doctrine, if it be true, ought at
‘ once to diſpel all gloomineſs, anxiety,
‘ and ſorrow from our hearts, and raiſe
‘ them to the higheſt pitch of love, ado-
‘ ration, and gratitude, towards God our
‘ moſt bountiful creator, and merciful fa-
‘ ther, and the inexhauſtible ſource of
‘ happineſs and perfection. Here ſelf in-
‘ tereſt, benevolence, and piety, all con-
‘ cur to move and exalt our affections.
‘ How happy in himſelf, how benevolent
‘ to

‘ to others, and how thankful to God,
‘ ought that man to be who believes both
‘ himself and others born to an infinite
‘ expectation. Since God has bid us re-
‘ joice, what can make us sorrowful?
‘ Since he has created us for happiness,
‘ what misery can we fear? If we be real-
‘ ly intended for ultimate unlimited hap-
‘ piness, it is no matter to a truly resigned
‘ person, when, or where, or how. Nay,
‘ could any of us fully conceive, and be duly
‘ influenced by, this glorious expectation,
‘ this infinite balance in our favour, it
‘ would be sufficient to deprive all present
‘ evils of their sting and bitterness. It
‘ would be a sufficient answer to all our
‘ difficulties and anxieties from the folly,
‘ vice and misery, which we experience
‘ in ourselves, and see in others, to say
‘ that they will end in unbounded know-
‘ ledge, virtue and happiness; and that the
‘ progress of every individual, in his passage
‘ through an eternal life, is from imper-
‘ fect to perfect, particular to general,
‘ less

‘less to greater, finite to infinite, and
‘from the creature to the creator.’

It must certainly be something truly excellent that could dictate such sentiments as these. If it be a delusion, it is sublime and elevating. But those who are acquainted with the writer’s theory of the mind, will be sensible that the sentiments are as agreeable to true philosophy, as they are to religion, though nothing but religion could have suggested them.

What is most to be apprehended is, that many persons have conceived so fixed an aversion to every thing that bears the name of *religion*, most interesting as, in its own nature, it must necessarily be, that they will not read, or give the least attention to, any thing relating to it. To address such persons on the subject is, of course, altogether in vain. But there are others, and I hope not a few, who will think it worth their while to inquire whether there be an *hereafter* for them, or not, whether they shall survive the grave, or
not,

not, and who may conceive that the question is not a matter of indifference to them with respect to the conduct, or the happiness, of their lives here. Among such persons I may hope to find some readers.

Great as is the increase of infidelity in the present age, and even, as I am informed, in this country, I cannot help flattering myself that it will not be so extensive here, as on the continent of Europe; because a great cause of its increase in those countries is the establishment of a very corrupt system of christianity in them. Absurdity supported by power will never be able to stand its ground against the efforts of reason. What is manifestly contrary to natural reason, *cannot* be received by it, and the bulk of mankind will not take the pains to distinguish between the different parts of a system that are equally *forced* upon them. Filled with indignation, they will reject the whole.

But happily, in this country, the *church* has no alliance with the *state*, every person being allowed to worship God in
whatever

whatever manner he pleases, or not to worship him at all if he be not so disposed, without being liable to any civil inconvenience. In these circumstances truth has the best chance of being heard, and of recommending itself; and nothing is wanting to the universal reception of pure christianity, but a candid attention to it, if, as I doubt not, it be founded in truth. Absurd doctrines being held by the majority of a people will, indeed, disgust many intelligent persons. But the liberty of preaching and publishing being uncontrolled, it will in time appear that christianity is not answerable for those absurdities. Its real nature will sooner or later be understood, and its evidences will be attended to, and this is all that its most zealous friends can desire. From reasonable men, truth requires nothing but a patient and candid hearing.

In this respect, the last age had the advantage of the present. At the time of the reformation from popery, and for more than a century afterwards, the sub-
ject

ject of religion obtruded itself upon all ranks of men, the scriptures were read with avidity, and the contents of them were the subjects of general conversation, and of such writings as all who could read, thought it necessary to be acquainted with. In these circumstances there were few unbelievers; and whenever the time shall come, that the scriptures shall be much and seriously read, it is, I will venture to say, impossible there should be many. The internal evidences of their divine authority are so numerous, and so striking, that it is hardly possible but that men's minds must perceive, and be impressed, by them. The history of the miracles of Moses, and of Jesus, are delivered with such simplicity, that even, without taking into consideration the effects they produced at the time, they strike with the force of truth.

I shall think myself happy if by means of writing, preaching, or conversation, I can in any degree draw this requisite degree of attention to the scriptures, and
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the evidences of christianity, or prepare the way for it, by exposing those monstrous corruptions and abuses of the christian religion, which contribute so much to prejudice the minds of sensible men against it, and indispose them to attend to any thing relating to it.

The large additions that I have made to this edition of this pamphlet have been occasioned by the perusal of the *Letters of Voltaire* in the last edition of his works, and also of *Mr. Volney's Ruins*, to which I have been led to give more attention than I had done before, in consequence of its being hinted to me, that I might have misrepresented *his* sentiments, as, through inadvertence, in the *Preface to my Discourses relating to the Evidences of Revelation*, I did those of Mr. Lequinio, by joining their names together, when I observed that Mr. Volney denied the existence of Jesus Christ, though in other publications I had given a just account of the sentiments of them both. As Mr. Volney is now in this country, and a copy of this pamphlet

pamphlet will be sent to him, it will be in his power to notice any mistake that he shall think I may have made with respect to his opinions, and the public which hopes to be instructed, to be led into truth, and not into error by him, will naturally expect it of him.

Some of my christian friends, who, for want of leisure, and other reasons, do not give themselves the trouble to read the writings of unbelievers, but who will give me credit for selecting what I think the most specious in them, will wonder that I have found nothing that has more the appearance of solidity in them. I can, however, assure them that, after perusing with some care all that the present age has produced of the kind, at least all that I have heard much boasted of, as *Bon Sens*, and the writings of Boulanger, and Freret; I can truly say that I have met with nothing in them more deserving of notice, than what I have at one time or other animadverted upon in the *Systeme de la Nature*, the writings of Hume, Mr Gibbon, Mr. Paine, Lequinio, Voltaire, or Mr.

Mr. Volney. There is not, in my opinion, any thing more of solid argument in the works of any of them. They all abound in confident and ill founded assertions, and gross mistakes or misrepresentations.

Young persons are apt to be dazzled with the reputation of several unbelievers, who have been greatly overrated by their friends. I feel no disposition to detract from their merit in any respect, though I think integrity the most important qualification in searching after truth. But, however brilliant may have been the talents of some unbelievers (I speak only of writers) they are not the men to whom the world is most indebted for making real advances in useful knowledge. In this respect I will venture to say that nothing of much consequence has been done by any of them. Mr. Hume, I have shewn in my *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, did not advance a single step in metaphysics, in which he held himself out as having done the most. The excellence of Voltaire was that of a poet and a lively writer. D'Alembert can hardly be classed
among

among writers in defence of infidelity, but his merit, besides that of an elegant writer in prose, is that of a mathematician, and he did not much advance the bounds of that branch of knowledge. The rest have no claim to reputation but as writers against revelation. And what were any, or all, of them compared with Newton, Locke, or Hartley, who were equally eminent as divines and as philosophers.

But what young persons, entering upon life, should be most influenced by, (if by any thing besides the mere love of truth) is the tendency of any system to promote virtue and happiness. In this respect what can we infer concerning Voltaire and D'Alembert, from their own letters, but that they were men full of self conceit, despising even all unbelievers besides themselves, full also of jealousy and malignity, perpetually complaining of the world, and of all things in it; and if we join to them their correspondent and admirer (but one whom it is evident they did

did not much admire) the late king of Prussia, we shall not add much to the mass of moral respectability or real happiness. No christian, in the humblest and most afflicted situation in life, need to envy them. I would not exchange my own feelings, even those in situations in which they would have thought me an object of compassion, for all the satisfaction they could have enjoyed in the happiest scenes of their lives. To social beings the great balm of life is friendship, founded on real esteem and affection, and of this they evidently had very little; whereas the attachment that I feel for many of my christian friends, though now separated from me by the ocean, and some of them by death, is, I am confident, a source of infinitely greater satisfaction to me, than all their friendships ever were, or could be of, to them.

We must not, however, forget that unbelievers of every class, have their place in the great system as well as the apostles, though we may be thankful that we are
not

not of the number. Of plants and animals, there are the seemingly mean and noxious, as well as the more noble and useful. A philosopher will not hate, or despise, any thing, but study the nature, and the uses, of every thing, and endeavour to derive advantage from every thing; believing that nothing was made in vain, and that a wise and benevolent providence directs and over rules all events.

N. B. *My readers are desired to strike out the name of Lequinio in p. xii. of the Preface to my late volume of Discourses, and also in my Answer to Mr. Paine, where it is mentioned in connection with that of Mr. Volney.*



Errata.

N. B. (b) signifies from the bottom of the page.

P. 16. l. 7 (b)	-	for	-	yet, in	-	read	-	yet
ib. l. 3 (b)	-	—	-	that	-	—	-	so that
p. 29. l. 11	-	—	-	not	-	—	-	not but
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p. 78. l. 16	-	—	-	with	-	—	-	into
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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

Increase of Infidelity.



SECTION I.

*Of different Persons forming different Judgments
of Things.*

BELIEVERS and unbelievers in christianity are equally interested in the solution of one problem, viz. on what principles the opinions of their opponents are founded. For they must both allow that their adversaries are *men*, as well as themselves, and therefore that their minds are equally subject to the same general laws, by which human nature is universally governed. Unbelievers, not being able to deny the fact, of the speedy and extensive propagation of christianity, immediately after the death and supposed resurrection of Jesus, when both Jews and Gentiles were hostile to it, and when the believers were exposed to all kinds of hardships in consequence of their belief, must have

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some method of satisfying themselves how this took place, on the supposition of the history of the miracles and resurrection of Christ not being true. The christian also must account for the want of the immediate and universal reception of his religion at that time, and of the absolute rejection of it by many intelligent, and some very worthy persons, in all christian countries, at the present day. For this, also, is a fact that cannot be denied, and therefore requires to be accounted for. Having endeavoured, in my former publications, especially my *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, to account for the non-reception of christianity by many persons at the time of its promulgation, I shall in the present Essay have a more particular view to the rejection of it by unbelievers, and especially philosophical ones, at this day.

To a person who himself entertains no doubt of the truth of revelation, the present prevalence of infidelity becomes the subject of a serious and interesting inquiry. We naturally think that the evidence which appears satisfactory to us, must appear so to all other persons; men being constituted alike, and consequently receiving the same impressions from the same objects.

This, indeed, is strictly true with respect to the ideas of *number* and *quantity*. For to them
all

all minds are in the same state, and therefore to all persons *three* must ever appear more than *two*, and exactly the half of *six*; and no person acquainted with the definitions of terms in geometry can possibly deny that the *three angles of a right angled triangle are equal to two right angles*. But with respect to propositions which do not admit of this kind of evidence (which depends upon the *coincidence of ideas*, or shewing that under different names the same things are comprehended) different minds may be very differently pre-disposed, so that the same object will not make the same impression, nor will the same evidence give the same satisfaction.

On the subject of religion, politics, or any thing else that is equally interesting to us, we daily see that the same arguments are very differently received by different persons. The books of Scripture are equally open to all persons, and all sects of Christians profess to derive their doctrines from them. But how much do they differ from each other? And though all ancient documents are equally read by the advocates for the original freedom, or the original despotism, of the English constitution, how different are their conclusions?

How different are the opinions that have been, and still are formed, by the readers of
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the same histories, of the characters of Cicero and Cæsar, of the merit or demerit of Charles I. of England, and of the principles of the American and French revolutions. And, in the middle ages, how differently did men think with respect to the question which agitated the whole of Christendom concerning the validity of the popes at Rome or at Avignon, when all the facts, on which their judgments were formed, were equally before all the parties.

But, what is more to my purpose, different persons, according to their different circumstances and dispositions, will entertain very different opinions concerning the probability, or improbability, the truth or the falsehood, of *facts*. Of this we had a remarkable instance in England at the time of the invasion of France by the Duke of Brunswick and the king of Prussia; some persons being confident that they had completely defeated the French army, and were on their march to Paris, and others seeing no reason to believe any such thing. And even after the retreat took place, it was a long time before the friends of government would give the least credit to it; and yet both parties had the very same intelligence.

Besides this, there are causes of assent to propositions wholly independent of any proper *evidence* presented to the mind itself; so that we may be led to presume that there is sufficient
evi-

evidence, though we do not ourselves perceive it. We are more especially in danger of being misled by specious *analogies*, and superficial, but fixed, *maxims* grounded on such analogies. These will, with many persons, even prevent any attention being given to proper evidence; so that, though it be in itself abundantly satisfactory to the candid and attentive, it is impossible that it should have any effect upon others.

On these accounts, truths of an historical nature are liable to be received very differently by different persons; and there is such a number of circumstances to be attended to in order to form a right judgment, that a small difference in the previous state of mind will have a great effect, as to the impression that the same evidence will make; so that different persons, having different ideas with respect to the previous probability, or improbability, of a fact, and also of the competency or incompetency of the evidence, may draw even contrary conclusions from the same report; one thinking it to be certainly true, and acting upon that idea, and another regarding it as unquestionably false, and, in his conduct wholly uninfluenced by it.

It may, I think, be said with truth, that the greater part of mankind form their opinions on most subjects, even those of the greatest importance, not on any evidence which themselves
have

have considered, but, in a great measure, from the opinions of other persons, of whose judgment they have, by one means or other, been led to think very highly. Thus children, confiding in the judgment and affection of their parents, which they think has seldom, if ever, misled them, in general adopt implicitly whatever faith, or practice, comes recommended to them by their authority. It is by this means, no doubt, that the children of Jews are almost universally of the Jewish religion, those of Mahometans Mahometans, those of Christians Christians, those of Quakers Quakers, &c. &c. Had they formed their opinions from any evidence present to their own minds, the probability would have been that, in all the cases, a much greater proportion of the children would have been of some religious persuasion different from that of their parents; because it was only one of a great number.

In like manner, if a person have by any means been led to form a high opinion of the sagacity and judgment of other persons, though not his parents or tutors, he will be apt to adopt their opinions, without any examination of his own. And this is evidently the case with the generality of unbelievers as well as of other classes of men, few of whom will even pretend to have taken the requisite pains to form a judgment for themselves, or indeed to have that acquaintance with ancient history, and other branches

branches of knowledge, which is necessary for the purpose.

They see many men universally celebrated for their genius, as Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and Franklin, to be unbelievers; and having, withal, other reasons to be disinclined to the belief of christianity, they persuade themselves that such men as these could not have become unbelievers without sufficient reason, and therefore think they cannot do wrong to rank with them, and readily join them in their ridicule of religion, and of the Scriptures, of which they have perhaps seen nothing but in the writings of other unbelievers, and especially the passages most open to misrepresentation. It appears to them more reputable to class with men of such superior understandings, rather than with the bulk of mankind, who retain that regard for religion which they received from their ancestors; the generality of religious persons being, it must be acknowledged, of this class. These, therefore, they are apt to hold in contempt, and, from the principle of association, the religion which they profess.

On such principles as these, or others no better founded, a person who believes, and, as he doubts not, on solid ground, that christianity is true, must account for other persons believing it to be false.

SECTION II.

Of the Influence which the Belief of Natural Religion, and moral Character, have in the Reception or Rejection of Christianity.

THERE is a necessary connection between *natural* and *revealed* religion. For the mission of Christ, if his pretensions were well founded, was from God, the author of nature, and proceeded from his good will to his offspring of mankind. And when the mind is strongly impressed with the belief of the existence, and perfections of God, of his constant presence, and moral government, the idea of his intercourse with men, by means of miracles and revelation, in order to give them the information they want concerning their duty here and their expectations hereafter, will appear easy, natural, and desirable ; and consequently will be favourably attended to.

But when, from the want of any sense of religion, ideas of God, of his goodness, and moral government, never occur to the mind, there cannot be any expectation, wish, or desire, of a revelation ; and the more completely this irreligious state of mind is impressed on any persons, the more improbable will every thing relating to the evidences of revelation appear, so that it
will

will be with great difficulty, if at all, that they can be brought to give sufficient attention to them. What, then, can be our expectation of such persons, whether nominal or only practical atheists, becoming christians? To persons whose thoughts never go beyond the visible course of nature, who have no faith in a wise and benevolent *author of nature*, nothing will appear more improbable than the account of any deviation from it; so that no evidence whatever will weigh with them in favour of it. Nay, for want of similar feelings on the subject, they can hardly be persuaded but that all persons, of whose understandings they have a good opinion, think as they do with respect to it. “We judge,” says, Dr. Hartley (*Observations on Man*, vol. ii. p. 319) “of the frame of
“other men’s minds by that of our own, as
“appears from the theory of association; and
“whatever differs in a great degree from our
“own puts on the appearance of something
“romantic and incredible.” Treating of the love of God, he says, *ib.* p. 325. “It passes all
“belief of those who have not experienced it;
“so that they look upon all the discourses and
“writings of those who have, to be either hy-
“pocritical, or romantic jargon.”

Considering the near relation that the precepts and the sanctions of revelation bear to moral duties, it is impossible but that the pre-
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vious disposition of mind with respect to morality must have considerable influence on the predisposition to receive or to reject it. And a circumstance which secretly, though not avowedly, adds to the difficulty of the cordial reception of christianity, is that it is by no means a system of mere speculative truth, but is intimately connected with the inward temper of mind, and the conduct of life. And both the disposition of mind and the practice required by christianity, are such as men accustomed to the ways of the world, and whose modes of thinking and acting have been formed by them (not excepting even many persons of a philosophical and speculative turn) cannot easily adopt, and reconcile themselves to.

That peculiar meekness and passiveness of disposition, which is essential to the christian character, though it be intimately connected with benevolence, is not that which makes a man appear to the most advantage in the eyes of the generality of mankind. On the contrary, a high spirit, and a promptness to resent injuries, which is condemned by christianity, much more effectually recommends men to general esteem; and it is at the same time a much more easy attainment, as it requires much less force and comprehension of mind, less self-command, and less government of the passions.

To

To preserve this equal temper of mind, in the promiscuous commerce of the world, requires constant vigilance, and must subject a man to many mortifications. For, notwithstanding the real superiority of the truly christian character to that of the men of the world, it will not be apparent to those who have no experience, feeling, or comprehension of it. Nay, this, or any other, account of it will rather tend to fill them with contempt and aversion for it. Yet, that it would be happy for the world if the meek and benevolent spirit of the gospel was universal, cannot be doubted. For certainly the man who is disposed to forgive an injury, would not voluntarily inflict one. The prevalence of this spirit would, therefore, be the reign of peace and good will. And to what must we ascribe the wars, and other evils, that have desolated the world, and filled it with misery, but the prevalence of an opposite spirit.

Men of the world being far more numerous than the meek, the pious, and the heavenly minded christians, these must expect to be treated with ridicule, as superstitious and weak minded persons; and they may think themselves happy if they escape the effects of real hatred and malevolence. This may be expected as much from men of genius and philosophers as from any others. Nay, the pride of understanding often leads such persons to treat those who
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think differently from them with peculiar contempt. But this is what our Saviour particularly apprized us of when he observed (John xv. 19,) that, *the world will love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* He adds, for our encouragement, (chap. xvi. 33,) *but it hated me before it hated you; and be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*.*

Moreover, a christian, a person who imbibes, and is habitually actuated by, the genuine spirit of his religion, considering himself as a candidate for immortality, and giving an infinite preference to a heavenly inheritance above any thing that this world can promise him, will, in his coolest and happiest moments, be always directing his thoughts upwards, having his *affections*, as the apostle says, placed on *heaven and heavenly things*;) which, as it marks a character totally different from that of the world, (of those who, having no other objects, *set their affections on things below*, must be, on that account, difficult to maintain, every thing they see calling them one way, and their christian principles another; so that they will live in the world as *strangers and pilgrims*; and they will accordingly ever hold themselves ready to abandon every enjoyment in this life, and even life itself, rather than, by violating the dictates of

* How unlike is this language to that of an impostor.

their

their consciences, forfeit their title to that which they justly consider as better than life.

As the chief attention of men will be drawn to those objects which they hold dearest to them, a christian will spend much of his time in reading, and meditating upon the scriptures, as the books which alone contain authentic records of the various dispensations of God to mankind, and especially that of christianity, which *brings life and immortality to light*. The genuine expressions of piety and benevolence in those books, unequalled by any thing that we perceive traces of in other compositions, will continually warm his heart, and impart new satisfaction on every perusal. By this means he will catch the same spirit; and a fixed sense of the presence and providence of God will inspire his mind with the sentiments of habitual devotion, which cannot be without the most diffusive benevolence, and the deepest humility.

In fact, the principles of christianity duly impressed will make a man what the scriptures emphatically and justly call *a new creature*, in many respects the reverse of the men of the world; and in proportion to the difference of character, and its superiority, must be the apprehended difficulty of attaining it. And every attainment apprehended to be above our reach, or which we are not willing to be at the pains
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to acquire, will be viewed with envy and dislike. Hence arises an almost invincible prejudice in the minds of men occupied with the business and pleasures of the world to those principles which would lead them off from them, and engage them in pursuits of an opposite nature.

The spirit and maxims of christianity will also lead men to make an open profession of their faith in every mode that they shall think most proper to make it known, respected, and embraced. It is what the obligation every man is under to do all the good in his power, and to extend the blessings that he possesses to others, absolutely requires of him. He will, therefore, think it his duty, to attend public worship, and in general to give his countenance to every thing that has the propagation of the gospel in its purity for its object. Now, an unbeliever, who has not been accustomed to any thing of the kind, will feel an almost insuperable repugnance to these things, and consequently will view with great prejudice whatever would lay him under such a disagreeable obligation.

Great, indeed, must have been the power of truth, and peculiarly strong its evidence, when christianity, at its first promulgation, produced greater changes than even these. For nothing could be more opposite than the prevailing sentiments and habits of the Heathens, and those

those of the primitive christians. But then it was aided by *recent miracles*, a kind of evidence which, where it was duly attended to, could not be withstood. Indeed, the difficulty with which the belief of christianity keeps its ground at present, when externally every thing favours it, is a proof that there must have been something very different in the circumstances of its first promulgation, when, though every thing that can be named was hostile to it, it established itself, to the overthrow of heathenism, and every thing else that stood in its way.

At this time the belief of christianity requires *attention* to the accounts of miracles wrought in former times. The evidence does not *obtrude* itself upon men, and therefore, their prejudices and habits indisposing them to give this attention, such changes are not to be expected. We must, therefore, be content if a few only of the more inquisitive and candid, and in other respects the best disposed, of unbelievers be induced to embrace christianity, and to live according to it; and if their example influence a few others, who, without much examination of their own, will feel themselves prejudiced in favor of what has gained the approbation of those whose judgment they have been led to respect; or if, without making converts, we can strengthen the faith, and improve the sentiments and conduct, of some who are already christians.

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That the great and extensive views of christianity do tend to elevate and purify the mind, and, that the narrow views of unbelievers tend to depress and debase it, is evident from the best ascertained theory of the formation of the intellectual sentiments. Unbelievers, having no views beyond the present life, will naturally be desirous of making the most of its enjoyments, and be unwilling to deny themselves any of those gratifications which in their opinion make life desirable. Hence great numbers give themselves up, as far as they can, without restraint to sensual gratifications. They are, indeed, destitute of those religious principles which we find to be so necessary, especially in youth, to restrain the irregular indulgence of the natural passions. And the necessary consequence of this indulgence (to say nothing of the more manifest evils to which it leads) is a great debasement of our rational nature. For though, as Hartley observes, vol. ii. p. 213, “ the sensible
“ pleasures are the first of which we are capa-
“ ble, and the foundation of the intellectual
“ ones, according to the law of association,” yet, in p. 212, “ it is in our power, by an
“ inordinate pursuit of them, to convert the
“ mental affections into sources of pain, and
“ to impair and cut off many of the intellectual
“ pleasures: that the balance shall be against us
“ on the whole.” And, as he says, p. 214,
“ the great business and purport of the present
“ life

“ life is the transformation of sensuality into
“ spirituality, by associating the sensible plea-
“ sures, and their traces, with proper foreign
“ objects.”

As the views of unbelievers, so their general maxims of conduct, will be different from those of christians. Unbelievers feeling no interest in any thing beyond this life, their present happiness will not only be the great object of their pursuit, but a regard to it will be the foundation of their *moral principles*. To this they will, and must, refer every thing ; and their love of others, of their country, and of mankind, will be no farther regarded by them than as it tends to promote their own happiness. Consequently, though, from the effect of a better education, of good early habits, or of emulation, they may be led to overlook their individual interest, and become even enthusiastically patriotic, they cannot be so from cool reflection ; and therefore their generosity and public spirit cannot be absolutely depended upon ; nor can they arrive at that dignity and elevation of mind, which, with his best judgment, carries the christian wholly out of himself, in the great pursuits of disinterested benevolence, a regard to the will of God, and to conscience ; which Hartley describes as the greatest attainment of man, his greatest perfection and happiness.

The unbeliever in a future state will naturally think that the demands of the Public upon him have their limits, and that he is not bound to do more for his country than his country does for him. Whereas the christian considers the demands of all, to whom it is in his power to render any service, as having no limits but those of the power itself. According to the generous and exalted principles of christianity, we are, like our Saviour, even to lay down our lives, not only for our friends, but even for our enemies, hoping for our recompence *at the resurrection of the just.*

The lower pursuits of our nature are checked by the principle of self interest. But these are designed to be only a means to the great objects above mentioned, and become gradually absorbed and lost in them, just as an express regard to other *means* is lost in the contemplation of their proper *ends*. It is the natural tendency of the principle of association, which is the great law of our intellectual nature, to bring men to this state, which Hartley calls *self annihilation*. And if our existence, under such influences as we are now exposed to, be continued a sufficient length of time, all men will arrive at it. But this progress may be accelerated, or retarded, by our attention to, or neglect of, the proper discipline of the mind. They who purposely turn their attention from the consideration of God, and his providence, respecting the
present

present and future condition of man, as discovered to us in revelation, will be thrown back in this intellectual course, till, in some new situation, some more severe discipline shall force them into it again; while they who exert themselves to cultivate a sense of piety to God, and never lose sight of the great views of things opened to us in the scriptures, will proceed towards the great end of their being with a constant and accelerated progress*.

Another source of real dignity and greatness of mind in a manner peculiar to believers in revelation, is piety, a lively sense of the constant presence, the providence, and the moral government of God; inspiring a deep reverence even for his name, and naturally leading to that intercourse with him, mental or vocal, which we term *prayer*. If frequent commerce [with great men, and the contemplation of great objects, tend to elevate the mind, the same cannot but be the effect of this constant intercourse

* I cannot help observing in this place, that the coincidence of the great precepts of christianity, *the love of God above all*, and the *love of our neighbour as ourselves*, with the ultimate tendency of our natures, as demonstrated by Hartley on the principle of the association of ideas, is a strong argument in favour of revelation. How came men so illiterate, and so ignorant in other respects, as the writers of the books of scripture, to hit upon sentiments so just and sublime, and so much superior to any that were known to the greatest philosophers in ancient times?

with the greatest and best of Beings, of, as it were, seeing God in every thing, and every thing in God.

On the other hand, unbelievers, having no faith in such an intimate intercourse as the history of revelation represents the author of nature keeping up with mankind, or in his great and benevolent designs respecting them, will not, at least will not easily or generally, give much attention to him, though they should not absolutely deny his existence ; so that they will have no great restraint on their minds from lightly profaning his name, in the low habits of cursing and swearing, and will not think such practices to be sinful ; and they will laugh at the idea of *prayer*. By these means, however, their minds become insensibly debased, and whatever be their intellectual attainments in other respects, their affections will be low and grovelling. A man cannot have any reverence for a Being who is not the object of his frequent and respectful attention.

If there be any truth in this account of the superiority of the truly christian character above that of those who look no farther than the present life ; as the latter, from its being wholly remote from their ideas, will not have any just conception of it, the *religious principles* which tend to form it will be regarded with prejudice by them ; and instead of admiring them, they
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may appear an object of dislike, and even of ridicule; just as ignorant persons are apt to dislike and ridicule the manners of foreigners, though more polished than their own, and in all respects superior to them. Even persons who have been educated in the belief of christianity may by degrees contract this unfavourable state of mind with respect to it.

The effect of discontinuing to read the scriptures, though some knowledge of them might have been acquired in early life, the never hearing them mentioned in serious conversation, and not attending any public worship, will be, that the impression made by the early reading of them will grow fainter and fainter, and at length will wholly disappear; and all respect for them will vanish. If, then, in the course of conversation with unbelievers, and the frequent reading of their writings, only those parts of the scriptures be mentioned which, singly taken are most open to ridicule, a contempt for the whole will be generated; and the evidence of revelation not having been properly studied, or impressed on the mind, infidelity will be the unavoidable consequence. This will be more especially the case with young persons in the gayer circles of life, who are not themselves distinguished for their mental ability, but who are apt to look up to those that are, and are too ready to join with them in a contempt

contempt for the opinions and practices of the vulgar.

It is very possible, from the force of the prejudice which, arising in this manner, indisposes the mind to every thing that bears the name of *religion*, that the very mention of such things as Balaam's ass, or Jonah's whale, shall be sufficient to give them an invincible disgust to every thing connected with them, and wholly prevent their giving any proper attention to the general evidence of the great facts on which the system of revelation is founded; though, when duly considered, it would infinitely overpower all objections from such circumstances as these.

But the strongest prejudice against christianity will arise from an addictedness to those vices which revelation prohibits. Men who are not strictly virtuous, and who know that every violation of the laws of virtue is an offence against religion, will, whether they will confess it or not, or indeed whether they attend to it or not, be impressed with a secret dislike of the subject, and will therefore gladly avail themselves of any excuse for giving no attention to it. This must be the case with all young men who have been addicted to profane swearing, or to that commerce of the sexes, and other practices, which christianity condemns. And not seeing the immediate bad consequences of those practices, they often will not allow them to be vices,
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and even find a handle against christianity for making them to be such.

This subject receives great light from Dr. Hartley's doctrine of *rational and practical assent*, which he justly observes, "reciprocally influence each other;" from which he infers (vol. i. p. 333) that "vicious men, that is, all persons who want practical faith, must be prejudiced against the historical and other evidences of revealed religion." If the practical assent generate the rational, so that, as he observes, (p. 332,) "the sanguine are apt to assert and believe what they hope," they who are with respect to revelation in a state of mind the reverse of sanguine, or previously disinclined to believe, will be apt to assert, and believe, the incredibility and falsehood of it, be its evidences in themselves ever so satisfactory.

"Practical atheism, or that neglect of God, where the person thinks of him seldom, and with reluctance, and pays little or no regard to him in his actions, though he does not deny him in words, as well as speculative atheism," he farther says, (vol. i. p. 492,) "proceeds from an explicit or implicit sense of guilt, and consequently a fear of God, sufficient to generate an aversion to the thoughts of him, and the methods by which the love of him might be generated, and yet too feeble to restrain from guilt.

Inattention

Inattention to the subject of religion, however generated, naturally leads to infidelity; and much intercourse with the world, the busy or the gay, the political, the commercial, or the philosophical, as it is now conducted, tends to produce this inattention. In this case the mind is wholly occupied with things foreign to religion. It never becomes the subject of conversation, and there not being in the mind any ideas that have associations with it, it will not easily occur even to a man's private thoughts. When this is the case, whether men be nominally unbelievers in christianity or not, they will be no better for it, as it cannot have any influence on their thoughts, words, or actions. It will not at all contribute to form the *character*, or give a turn to their sentiments. Their minds are so wholly engrossed by the things of this world, that they never raise their views above them. They have no hopes or wishes respecting a future world, and therefore cannot be prepared to make any sacrifices to the consideration of it.

This inattention to religion has of late years been increasing, and is now become very general. In France and other popish countries, religion has never been any serious object to men of the world, and whenever it has obtruded itself upon their notice, it has been in some form that could not command their respect,
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but rather excite their contempt and disgust. Can we wonder, then, at the general prevalence of infidelity in France, and other countries similarly situated in that respect?

It may be said, and with some appearance of reason, that if some persons be biaſſed againſt the evidences of revelation, others will be no leſs biaſſed in favour of them. A good man, who hopes that a future life will be in his favour, will naturally wiſh that there may be ſuch a ſtate, and will therefore overlook deficiencies in the evidence for it. Admitting this, it is certainly ſome argument in favour of revelation, that the prejudices of the virtuous are for it, and thoſe of the vicious againſt it; and a ſtate of abſolute indifference to a queſtion of this magnitude is impoſſible. It is what all men are too nearly intereſted in.

That *life* is univerſally conſidered as a thing of great value is evident from the care of all mankind to preſerve it. Conſequently, an *ever-laſting life* muſt be of infinite value to any perſon who hopes to enjoy himſelf in it. A virtuous man, therefore, free from ſuperſtition, cannot but ardently wiſh for it, though perſons of a different character, who ſecretly, at leaſt, ſuſpect that a future life would not be to their advantage, may wiſh that there was no ſuch thing, for themſelves, or others. In this
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state of mind, especially if they be irritated by controversy on the subject, they may even come not to be able to bear the mention of it without emotions of dissatisfaction and dislike, which will extend to all who believe and rejoice in it; and what is a frequent, though not a necessary, consequence, they may take great pains to destroy that faith in others. On the other hand, a christian, hoping for a future life for himself, wishes it for all other persons, and considers with compassion those who are destitute of so cheering a persuasion, and will earnestly endeavour to impart it to them.

But admitting that a good man will be prejudiced in favour of the arguments for a future state, and consequently in favour of christianity, it may not only be said that the interest he feels in the question will induce him to be scrupulous in the examination of it; but that the situation of the best of men is such, that their hopes and wishes will not lay so great a bias on their minds, as that which affects vicious persons in a contrary way.

Such is the advantage which things *seen* have over things *unseen*, in consequence of the commerce of the world continually obtruding the latter upon our attention, that a tendency to believe in a future state will generally be less than a tendency to unbelief; since, as Hartley
justly

justly observes (vol. ii. p. 331) “vividness of ideas tends to unite the subject and predicate of propositions sooner and closer.” Our ideas of a future state, according to christianity, are at best general and indistinct, so as not to lay much hold on the imagination, like those of the paradise of Mahomet. According to him, the joys of heaven are definite enough, and therefore more likely to excite vivid ideas. But this is not the religion that I am defending.

Great sanguineness of expectation may promote belief. But all that the generality of christians, who are free from enthusiasm, pretend to, is a humble *hope* that their lot will be better hereafter than it is at present. Such is the diffidence that truly good men have of themselves, arising from the consciousness of their imperfections, that they hardly ever attain to more, though naturally sanguine in other respects. Consequently, a good man who only *hopes* that a future life will be in his favour, will not be so much biassed by his hope, or belief, as a wicked man, who justly dreads the thought of it, will be biassed against it.

SECTION

SECTION III.

Of the necessary Consequence of an Acquaintance with the Scriptures, and of a candid and impartial Attention to them.

THE various obstacles to a candid and impartial reading of the scriptures explained in the preceding section, are much to be lamented, since nothing else seems to be wanting to the conversion of all unbelievers. Could they but read the historical parts of the Old and New Testaments with a reasonable share of candour and impartiality, it would be impossible but that their minds must be impressed with a persuasion of their truth ; they bear so many internal marks of it. No person reading the books of Moses, the life of Christ, or the Acts of the apostles, with due attention, and with a sufficient knowledge of antient history and of human nature, can believe such men to have been impostors. The opinion he could not but conceive of their excellent characters, for piety, benevolence, and integrity, would repel every idea of the kind, whatever difficulties he might find in reconciling some parts of the narrative with others ; difficulties, however, such as we find in all histories written by different persons. And this favourable impression concerning the
character

character of the scripture historians, and the persons whose history they write, would prepare the mind for a serious and candid examination of the external evidence, which would presently appear superior to that of any other history whatever.

But by persons previously disposed to cavil, the most important considerations are frequently overlooked, and therefore it is impossible that they should make a proper impression on their minds. Otherwise, they could not be sensible that, in rejecting revealed religion, they subjected themselves to much greater difficulties than they could have found in consequence of receiving it, admitting these to be considerable. If Moses was an impostor, it must, surely, appear extraordinary, that, without the advantage of any splendid talents, as those of an orator, or a warrior, he should impose upon a whole nation, and make them receive a system of religion and laws to which they always shewed the greatest aversion.

But admitting that a man of superior knowledge should arise in a nation so ignorant as the Jews were, he could only have imposed upon them by pretences to *miracles*; and let them be supposed ever so stupid, and to *reason* ever so ill, they certainly had the external *senses* of other men. And if the nature of the miracles of Moses be considered, it must be evident, that it

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was out of his power, or that of any man, to impose upon others so grossly as, if the Jews were imposed upon at all, they must have been; the miracles were upon so large a scale. Let any person only consider the nature, and the magnitude, of the miracles exhibited in Egypt, such as the changing of all the water in the river into blood, or any thing resembling blood, the deaths of the first born, and of the first born only, of man, and of beast too, through the whole extent of the country in one night, and this distinctly announced some time before, the passage of the whole nation through the Red Sea, their hearing the articulate pronunciation of the ten commandments from mount Sinai, their being fed with manna forty years, with many others, and he must be sensible that the most stupid of mankind could never have been so grossly imposed upon. With respect to the *books* containing an account of these miracles, there is as much evidence of their having been written by Moses, and of their having been published while the events were recent, as there is of the genuineness and antiquity of any other writings whatever, whether we consider their internal or external evidence.

If it be supposed that the books were written in any later period, it must be so much the more difficult to account for the nation receiving them as antient and genuine writings, and their submitting

mitting to the laws and institutions prescribed in them, during the time of their extreme proneness to idolatry, which certainly continued till the Babylonish captivity; and after this time all attempts to impose upon the nation such books as those of the Old Testament, must have been in vain. Let a similar attempt be made with respect to any other nation in the world, and let the event determine.

Independently of the difficulty of imposing upon any nation in such a manner as the Jews must have been imposed upon, and with respect to facts notoriously true, or notoriously false, there is surely some difficulty in accounting for Moses, or any other Jew, delivering such a system of religion and laws as his books contain, a system so totally different from those of all other neighbouring nations, and so much superior to them, without any superior advantage with respect to genius or education. When all other nations without exception were devoted to the worship of a multiplicity of deities, and practised the most abominable and cruel rites, how came Moses alone to teach the doctrine of *one God*, the sole creator and governor of all things, and that he was to be worshipped by rites entirely free from all impurity or cruelty? How came the religion of the Hebrews to be the only one in all antiquity that was favourable to purity of morals, and, what
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is perhaps more extraordinary still, free from the superstitions of divination, magic, and necromancy, to which all antient nations without exception were addicted. It is an ignorance of nature, or of the real causes of events, that is the parent of all this superstition. But how came Moses, and the Jews, to be more knowing in this respect than the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the Romans?

The same and still greater difficulties occur with respect to christianity, and the history of its promulgation, which must be wholly overlooked by unbelievers; and yet compared with them all the difficulties that remain upon the minds of christians, considerable as they are confessed to be, are as nothing. If Jesus and the apostles worked no real miracles, how came so many thousands of the nation of the Jews, averse as it is well known they were to their pretensions, to *believe* that they did; when it was at the hazard of every thing dear to them in life, and even of life itself, that they professed their belief? How were the eyes, the ears, and other senses, of those Jews who were cotemporary with Jesus and the apostles imposed upon, as they must have been, if no miracles were really wrought? For this was not a business of reasoning and *argumentation*, with respect to which it is acknowledged that it might not be difficult for one man to impose upon others.

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If it be said that the cotemporaries of Jesus, and of the apostles were not imposed upon, but that the imposition began at a later period, the difficulty will be much increased. Because, whenever the story was told as a thing that took place in *time past*, it must have been well known that no evidence of it existed. If such books as those of the Evangelists and the *Acts of the Apostles* were first published at this day, could it be possible to make them be received as antient and genuine writings, authentic and true histories? And could a single man be found who would risk his liberty, or his life, for his faith in them?

If the writings of the apostles be spurious, it will not be denied that the epistles of Pliny are genuine, and from them it appears that Christianity was the general belief of the province of Bythinia, and probably of all Asia Minor, in his time. And could this have been the case if its origin had not been prior to his time, and indeed as early as the evangelical history supposes it to have been?

If the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles do not contain a true history, the epistles of Paul, Peter, James, and, John, must be spurious too. But let any person of common sagacity peruse them, with the least attention, and say, whether they bear any marks of forgery, and whether they do not as strictly correspond to the

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events

events and circumstances of the times in which those men lived, as the epistles of Cicero do to the incidents of his life, and consequently, whether they be not as great a confirmation of the Gospel history, as his epistles are of the Roman. There cannot be a doubt but that the writers of those epistles, whoever they were, were very different from one another, and from the author of the Acts of the Apostles. So complex a forgery as this must have been, if it be a forgery; is far beyond the powers of man; and yet the writers discover no marks of superior ability.

But, independently of these difficulties respecting matters of *history*, how could it have been in the power of a Jewish carpenter, with fishermen for his principal assistants and followers, to impose upon the Jewish nation and the world, as he did? How came such a person as he to form so sublime and just ideas of God and of virtue, and especially to teach the doctrine of a future state with more distinctness and authority than any man who had ever preceded him? And it must be considered that the doctrine of Jesus on this subject was that of the resurrection of the dead at a future period, a doctrine the most improbable in itself, and fundamentally different from the doctrine of a soul surviving the body, on which principle only the heathen philosophers taught a future state. How came this Jewish carpenter and his followers
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to effect such a revolution in the religious system of all the civilized part of the world, as had never been attempted, or thought of, by any man before him?

Are not these difficulties, and many others might be added to them, of a very serious nature? and yet they do not seem to have occurred to the generality of unbelievers. Indeed, they seem not to have had a sufficient knowledge of facts in antient history to be apprized of them; and the few who have mentioned, or alluded to, any of them do not appear to have considered them with attention, as becomes philosophers, but to have contented themselves with giving the most superficial and unsatisfactory answers; ascribing the belief of the miracles above mentioned to the general *credulity of mankind*. But, in other cases, men do not content themselves with assigning general causes for particular effects. And, credulous as men sometimes are, they cannot be made to believe *any thing*, especially things which they have no predisposition to believe, and advanced by persons to whom they are not previously disposed to give credit. A cause should be assigned for their credulity in every particular case. For every specific effect must have a specific cause; the human mind being subject to as regular laws as any thing else in nature.

But while these considerations are not *attended to*, the scripture history will necessarily appear as fabulous as the popish legends, the circumstances of difference, though so great, being wholly overlooked by the reader.

SECTION IV.

Of Causes of Infidelity not unfavourable to the moral Character, and a Method of judging when they operate.

IN general, I doubt not, the inattention of unbelievers to such considerations as those above mentioned, arises from something in their character, and habits of life, unfavourable to them; habits which render them averse to the doctrines and precepts of revealed religion, so that they secretly wish they may not be true. But the same effect may be produced from a turn of mind which leads men to look at the dark side of every thing, and to fear, and suspect, that every thing they wish to be true may prove false. In that state of mind, they will always incline to dwell on the objections to revealed religion, rather than on the direct evidence

dence for its truth; and the consequence of this attention to the one in preference to the other, may be a state of scepticism and incredulity; and thus some very worthy and well disposed persons may class with unbelievers. But they are comparatively few.

That this is a very possible case, we see with respect to other things. How many persons are there in circumstances in which any stranger would conclude that they must be happy, and have great enjoyment of themselves; and yet, for want of *attending* to these circumstances, and by perpetually dwelling upon things that are unfavourable to them, they are far from being happy. On the contrary, they are continually complaining; at the same time that the things they complain of appear to all their friends to be very inconsiderable.

From whatever turn of mind it be that persons are led to give more attention to the objections to revelation than to the evidences for its truth, they will lean to the side of scepticism and infidelity. But, in the eye of reason, and of God, infidelity arising from these very different *causes* will be regarded in a very different light. In some it will be an argument of profligacy, in others of anxiety and timidity.

That the infidelity of many persons in France, has arisen from inattention, and gross ignorance, whatever was the cause of it, is evident to every person

person in the least conversant with ancient history. For Mr. Volney, as I shall shew, supposes that no such person as Jesus Christ ever existed. Whereas, had he given any attention to the history of the times in which christianity was promulgated, whether written by christians or others, he could have had no more doubt of the existence of Jesus Christ, whatever he had thought of his miracles, than of that of Julius Cæsar. It is as much in vain to argue with such a person as this, as with a Chinese, or even a Hottentot.

Many unbelievers will say, and I doubt not with truth, that they have read both the scriptures themselves, and the best defences of revelation that have been recommended to them, and yet see no reason to believe in it. To this nothing can be replied, but that, in the states of mind that I have described, it is impossible for them to give what deserves to be called a *due* attention to any just representation of things. The words in which they are expressed may be heard, or read, but the mind may be so preoccupied, that it shall be impossible for them to make their proper impression; and the best arguments may be no sooner heard, or read, than they shall be entirely forgotten, or wholly neglected, so that they shall have no more *effect*, than if they had never been presented to the mind at all.

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The possibility of wholly overlooking things even with the eyes open, and the object immediately before them, we see in persons who are searching for particular plants, or other objects, among things of a similar nature. A hundred things may come in view in the course of this search, but, not being particularly *noticed*, the person, who nevertheless *must* have seen them, shall not be able to recollect his having seen them at all. The same is the case with a person who peruses a book with a particular view, or a particular bias upon his mind. He does not see, or at least he does not regard, any thing but what he is purposely looking for, and wishes to find; and yet he may not be conscious to himself of any partiality or bias at all. In this case it is hardly possible for the mind to perceive its own delusion, and there seems to be no remedy for it.

It is, however, every man's interest, and therefore should be his endeavour, to keep his mind as free from prejudice as possible, in order that every truth may meet with no obstruction to its reception with him; and I think the following consideration may, perhaps, be of some use to enable a person to distinguish whether his mind be under any unfavourable prejudice with respect to revealed religion, or not.

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Whatever appears advantageous to us, we naturally wish to obtain. Now to a virtuous and well disposed mind, the desire of having his existence continued, that he may see more and more of the admirable system of which he forms a part, and enjoy his being with increasing advantage, is surely unavoidable, if any thing be so. He will, therefore, naturally *wish* that Christianity, which alone holds out this glorious prospect to virtuous men, should be true. It cannot, if it be duly considered, appear to be a matter of indifference to any man, like a mere speculative truth, a proposition in Geometry, or Algebra, in which he has no interest. Also, every person must *know* whether he has this wish, or not. For, if he duly apprehend the great object, he must have a very earnest wish that Christianity may be true; and if he do give up the belief of it, it will be with sensible regret.

Now it appears to me, that few of the unbelievers that I have ever conversed with, have any concern about the matter, or rather they wish that Christianity may not be true. For they rejoice, and triumph, in every seeming refutation of it. I therefore conclude, that they are in such a state of mind as inclines them to wish that it may not be true, probably from suspecting that they should be rather losers than gainers, in consequence of it. They
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therefore prefer even annihilation to the prospect of that future state of retribution which Christianity holds out to them; and from a dislike of the subject, they apply to other studies, and engage in other pursuits, which entirely preclude all attention to this, though, in itself, certainly the most important, and the most interesting, of all others.

To a person of a thoughtful and speculative turn of mind, capable of enlarged and extensive views of things, the scriptures present such an idea of the conduct of providence, as he cannot abandon without peculiar regret. To an unbeliever in Christianity and a future state, the ways of God, if he believe in any God at all, must appear exceedingly dark. He neither knows how things came into being, nor to what they tend, and his own personal interest and importance in the great scheme is as nothing. But revelation opens a great, a glorious, and most animating prospect, and one in which every individual has the greatest personal interest. We are there informed concerning the origin of the human race, of their final destination, and of many particulars of the vast plan of Providence, including the divine missions of Moses and of Christ, the great object of which was to form men to virtue here, and to happiness hereafter.

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We also learn in the scriptures, that all the evils of life, the contemplation of which cannot but perplex and distress the serious unbeliever, are only a part of that discipline which is necessary to the great end above mentioned. We therefore see the hand, the benevolent hand, of God, in every thing; and though in a state of trouble and persecution, can *go on our way rejoicing*. In the history of revelation, we see the attention which God has given to men, in affording them light by degrees, and as they were able to bear it; instructing them more or less from the beginning of the world, giving them more distinct and important lessons by Moses and the prophets, and completing the whole scheme by Christ and the Apostles.

By the light of revelation we have the pleasing prospect of the gradual improvement of the whole human race, in their progress from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, and from a state of barbarity and perpetual hostility, to a state of universal peace, virtue, and happiness, in which we are assured that this world is to terminate.

Now, what has an unbeliever to contemplate in comparison with these, and other great views, which revelation holds out to us, the contemplation of which tends to elevate and ennoble the mind, so as to make a man a superior kind of being to a person who has no know-

knowledge or belief of them? I cannot help concluding, therefore, that a man who voluntarily shuts his eyes to this prospect, must have a strong bias upon his mind, and of a very unworthy kind; and if he does it involuntarily, and with regret, he will not do it without great hesitation, and the most sensible concern.

Let the unbeliever then be ingenuous, and say, whether he really *feels* this concern, or not. If he be insensible to the great views I have mentioned, I shall conclude that his mind is in a low and degraded state; and that, whatever else he may know, he is destitute of the very elements of a right judgment in *this* case and must be left to his own delusions. On the whole, I cannot help concluding with Dr. Hartley (*Observations on Man*, vol. ii. p. 190.) that “notwithstanding the great prevalence of
“infidelity, in modern times, it is seldom found
“to consist with an accurate knowledge of an-
“cient history, sacred and profane, and never
“with an exalted piety and devotion to God.”

SECTION. V.

Of the Kind of Objections that have been made to divine Revelation.

IF we consider the objections that have been made to revelation by the most celebrated unbelievers, we shall find them to be of such a nature, as to imply no great attention to the subject, or such an examination as historical evidence necessarily requires. By some *prescriptive** arguments, which may be formed in a very short time, they save themselves the trouble of that accurate inquiry into the state of facts, which cannot be made without time and patience, but which the discussion of the evidences of revelation absolutely requires:

The great question between believers and unbelievers in revelation, is whether it was possible, consistently with the principles of human nature, as we now find them, and as we must all take it for granted they ever have been, for such numbers of persons as the whole Jewish

* Tertullian wrote a treatise entitled *De præscriptione*, in which, without considering the arguments of the Heretics of his time, he endeavoured to prove that they could not be in the right, as their tenets were not held in the churches that were founded by the apostles.

nation consisted of at their departure from Egypt, and so many thousands of Jews at Jerusalem at the time of the promulgation of Christianity, as were then converted to it, to have believed the miracles recorded in the scriptures, when they required nothing more than the evidence of the senses, and when they had every motive that men could have to ascertain the truth of the facts, and yet that there should have been no truth in them. This, the believer says, would be a greater miracle than any that the history of revelation supposes. Now the solution of this problem has never been attempted by unbelievers. Nor, indeed, has the case itself been properly noticed by them; they having contented themselves with ascribing this great affect, in a random and arbitrary manner, to the credulity of mankind, without endeavouring to shew that, in any similar circumstances, mankind have discovered the same credulity. This will appear if we consider, as I briefly shall do, the general turn of their arguments.

I. Many unbelievers, and especially Mr. Hume, without pretending to examine any historical evidence, have satisfied themselves with saying, that miracles being contrary to our own experience, all accounts of them must be false. But this is easily shewn to be no true state of the case, since events may take place occasionally which do not happen always; so that miracles

cles might have been wrought in the time of Moses, and of Christ, and not at this day. There is no contradiction in this, since both may be true. All that can in reason be said is, that miracles being unusual appearances, and not analogous to any that fall under our own observation, they require more definite evidence than ordinary facts. But accounts of them should not be rejected without a due examination of the evidence alleged for them.

What would philosophers say if, upon the publication of any new fact, or appearance in nature, no attention should be paid to the evidence produced in favour of it, but it should be treated as a thing that was impossible *a priori*, and therefore undeserving of examination? Many phenomena in nature appear at first sight to be inconsistent, as those of magnetism and electricity, and many in chemistry, with the laws of gravitation, which are not so in reality, and only shew that we had been too hasty in drawing general conclusions, which now require to be modified, the facts in both the cases being unquestionable.

2. Most unbelievers have undeaoured to prove that, without any examination of the particular facts, on which the truth of the Jewish and Christian revelations rest, we may take it for granted, that those religions *cannot* be true; being, as they conceive, in several respects, unworthy

worthy of God, and inconsistent with the dictates of natural religion.

But what do we know of nature, or the Author of Nature, except from facts? The first thing, therefore, that is to be done, is to enquire into the truth of the facts; and if the evidence be sufficient to establish *this*, we must leave the question of their consistency, or inconsistency with other facts to subsequent discussion, however we may be induced by any new appearances to correct the conclusions we may have drawn from preceding ones.

Deductions concerning the moral attributes of God from the works of nature, are by no means so easy, and certain, as from facts in the history of his transactions with men; and there is no process of investigation so familiar to the mind, as that by which we judge of human testimony. How then can we be authorised to say that what is fully ascertained, by indisputable evidence, to have been actually done, or said, by the Divine Being (evidenced by such works as only the Author of nature could do) is inconsistent with any thing that the mere light of nature teaches us concerning him?

In fact, they who reject revelation on this pretence, first form an idea of the supreme Being from their own imaginations, and not from the productions of nature, and then conclude that certain things ascribed to him in the scripture

ture history are unworthy of him. But if the history be sufficiently authenticated, the seemingly anomalous parts in the Divine conduct should be treated like similar anomalies in natural appearances, and in the conduct of providence; leading us only to limit and modify former conclusions, which were before too general. At least, they should not be at once given up as false, but be considered as *difficulties*, on which future observations may throw some light.

But that the moral character of the Divine Being, as deduced from revelation, is, on the whole, taking the great outline of it, free from all reasonable objection, is what no person can deny. Nothing is more clearly inferred from the light of nature, than what we learn in the scriptures concerning the Author of nature, viz. that God is *one*, that he is himself the maker and governor of all things, that he is infinitely powerful, wise and good, that he is a Being of the strictest veracity, that he is merciful to the penitent, that he is a lover of virtue and a hater of vice, and that he will reward the one, and punish the other, if not in this life, yet surely in another. It is impossible to read the scriptures in the most superficial manner, without forming this idea of God; and a thousand doubts concerning the rectitude or the goodness of God will arise from considering the works of nature, for one that can occur to the most prejudiced person

person to any of the moral attributes of God from the history of revelation.

The general inferences, therefore, above mentioned, should remain with us (even more than the belief of the goodness of God from the works of nature) whatever we may be able to make of some particular circumstances which seem to be at variance with them. But it appears to me, that all the objections that have been made of this kind (the principal of which relates to the extermination of the Canaanites) are easily and satisfactorily answered. However, the objection to the whole of revelation from an attention to particular objectionable parts, requires no time, or labour of examination, and supposes only the most superficial knowledge.

3. Other persons become unbelievers from seeing such doctrines maintained by believers, as they find to be contrary to common sense, and such abuses of other kinds as they find in all the civil establishments of Christianity, and which are highly injurious to civil society; taking it for granted, that such doctrines, and such abuses, are authorised by the christian religion. They more particularly revolt at the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, held by all catholics, and that of the *trinity*, by most protestants, and at the excessive power assumed by the popes, and indeed by priests of most christian communions. But, surely, in a matter of this moment, every

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man ought, at least, to take the pains, to see with his own eyes, and to judge, by the rules of fair criticism, whether such doctrines be contained in the scriptures, and whether such abuses be authorised by Christ and the apostles.

4. It has hitherto been unfortunately maintained by almost all Christians, that the scriptures are divinely inspired; and this being assumed by unbelievers, every impropriety of sentiment in the writers, and the slightest contradictions in the history, sufficiently authorise them, as they think, to reject the whole. But they should, at least, see whether the writers *pretend* to such inspiration, which they evidently do not; or if they did, they might be mistaken with respect to that circumstance, as they give no evidence of it, and the history be in the main as authentic as any other whatever.

In all these cases, a person taking it for granted that revelation *cannot* be true, takes no pains to inform himself concerning the evidence of the facts, which would require much reading, and patient investigation, and consequently much *time*. He does not so much as read the scriptures themselves, or only looks into them in the most superficial manner; so that, besides knowing nothing of the external evidence, he has no perception of that internal evidence, which could not fail to strike a diligent and impartial reader.

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The only unbeliever who appears to me to have had any idea of the true state of the question between believers and unbelievers, is Mr. Gibbon. Being acquainted with history, he saw no reason to entertain any doubt with respect to the circumstances in which Christianity is said to have been promulgated in the gospels, and the Acts of the apostles, and consequently the rapidity with which it spread through the most distant provinces of the Roman empire. He could not deny the remarkable fact, that a few unlearned men, of a despised nation, conceived such ideas respecting the enlightening and reforming of the world, as had never occurred to the greatest philosophers of the most celebrated nations, and that they succeeded in the bold design; having propagated the new religion with unexampled success in the learned and civilized, as well as the unlearned and uncivilized, parts of the world, and this notwithstanding the greatest sufferings to which they and their followers were universally exposed; so that there could not have been wanting any motive to the most rigorous examination of the facts on which it was founded, and while they were all recent. He therefore thought it necessary to give his ideas of the causes of this wonderful event. For he could not but be sensible, that every effect requires an adequate cause. But the lameness of his account betrays the

most extreme prejudice, amounting to a total incapacity of forming a right judgment in the case.

Mr. Gibbon with great seriousness ascribes the rapid spread of christianity chiefly to the zeal of its advocates, the strictness of their discipline, and the promises of happiness in another world, which the new religion held out to men. But this is no more than, with the Indian, placing the world upon the elephant, without knowing that the elephant was supported by the tortoise. For he gives no account at all of the cause of the great zeal of the primitive Christians, of the strictness of their discipline, or how so many persons were induced to believe these flattering promises of future happiness, so as to live and die in the firm belief of it. Consequently, the great difficulty of the ready reception of the gospel, and the rapid spread of Christianity, without being supported by miracles, remains just as he found it, that is, wholly unaccounted for. The gospel history clearly accounts for every thing that took place. But if that history be false, if no miracles were ever wrought, the *belief* of those miracles, by persons so indisposed to the reception of Christianity as both the Jews and Gentiles of that age evidently were, was absolutely impossible, on any known principles of human nature. Consequently, a much greater miracle is in reality

reality admitted by unbelievers, than any that the gospel history supposes, and a miracle without any rational object whatever.

It is common with many unbelievers to say, that such is the power of *priests*, that they can impose any religion on the *vulgar*, and that to such influence may be ascribed the belief of the Jewish and christian miracles. As I have much to observe on this subject, I shall consider it in a separate section.

To me there cannot be any clearer proof of the insufficiency of the grounds on which the generality of unbelievers reject Christianity, than the extraordinary impression that has been made, especially in America, by Mr. Paine's *Age of Reason*. If I be rightly informed, this work has done much towards unchristianising a great part of the nominally christian world. For there is not, perhaps, as I think I have shewn in my remarks upon it, any book of the kind which abounds with more palpable mistakes with respect to notorious facts, or with reasoning more manifestly inconclusive. At the same time such rational and excellent defences of Christianity as that of Mr. Paley's, to say nothing of other publications which have the same object, are comparatively read by very few, and serve only (which is all that I expect from this performance) to confirm the faith
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of some christians, without bringing back any that have once declared their disbelief of christianity.

SECTION VI.

Of the Influence of the Jewish and Christian Priests with respect to their Power of imposing upon the common People.

WHEN unbelievers in revelation are asked how the Jews and Christians were brought to believe the miracles of Moses and of Christ, if no such miracles were wrought, they frequently say, that it is in the power of *priests* to make the common people believe any thing, and that we see this in all countries, and in all ages. But this assertion, besides being too general, does not at all apply to the case of *Jewish* or *christian* priests.

In all the cases in which priests have had the most influence, and seem to have led the common people, the people were previously disposed to believe what they were taught by them; the superstitions to which they were addicted (arising from an ignorance of the laws of nature) having been common to the whole nation, the

the priests as well as the people themselves. All the heathen religions existed, as far as appears, before any particular institution of a priesthood to administer the rites of them. The priests of Greece and Rome, of whose functions and powers we have the most knowledge, were in no important respect wiser than the rest of the people; nor indeed were their offices distinct from, or incompatible with, civil offices; Julius Cæsar and Agricola were priests, and Cicero an augur. What knowledge then, could there have been peculiar to the priests, of which they could have availed themselves to impose upon the rest of the people, if they had had any interest distinct from theirs?

It appears from Herodotus that in the early ages princes, priests, and people were alike ignorant and superstitious; and when the light of philosophy beamed upon Greece and Rome, the newly acquired knowledge was by no means peculiar to priests, or gave them any umbrage, as if any secrets they had were in danger from it. Some of the wisest and most learned of the ancients were as much devoted to the popular superstitions as the vulgar. This was evidently the case with the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Julian.

If we attend to the circumstances of barbarous nations, such as the Tartars, or North-American Indians, we shall not find their priests
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in possession of any more real knowledge than the people. They are equally ignorant and superstitious, firmly believing in the efficacy of their various charms, and other ceremonies. Or if they have recourse to any artifice, it is, there is reason to think, only to obtain greater credit to what they believe fundamentally entitled to it; and from this use of artifice too few persons of any country, or of any religion, have had the just firmness entirely to abstain. More, I doubt not, of the tricks of the Romish priests and monks were the contrivance of sincere believers, than of unbelievers.

The common people are said to be credulous, and accordingly easily imposed upon. But this is only true in cases in which they are, from their prejudices, previously disposed to credulity. For where the things that are endeavoured to be imposed upon them are contrary to their pre-conceived prejudices and habits, they are always incredulous and obstinate in proportion to their ignorance, and accordingly they have always been the last persons in every country to adopt any new opinion, or practice. This was particularly evident in the progress of christianity. For the people of the villages were so much later than others in abandoning their ancient superstitions, that the term *pagans* (*pagani*) became synonymous to *heathens*; the inhabitants of the cities, better informed, and more open to conviction,

viction, having changed their opinions and customs long before them.

With respect to the Jewish and Christian religions, it was absolutely impossible that their establishment could have received the least aid from priestcraft, since they were established before any such order of men as priests existed; and besides, in both the cases, the prejudices of the people at large were directly opposed to them. The splendid miracles wrought in Egypt, the passage through the Red Sea, and the delivery of the ten commandments from mount Sinai, preceded any appointment of priesthood among the Jews; and the posterity of Moses, who was the principal instrument in all the religious institutions of the Hebrews, were not priests, but were included in the class of common Levites. Besides, what knowledge had Moses or Aaron more than the other chiefs of the nation, and how could it have been in their power to make that refractory people receive a system of religion which they evidently did not like, and to believe things to be true, the falsehood of which, if they were false, they must themselves have been witnesses to. The rebellion against Moses and Aaron demonstrates that the rest of the people were not previously disposed to respect them, any more than the miracles wrought in their favour compelled them to do it.

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That the great mass of the Hebrew nation were exceedingly indisposed to the religious institutions of Moses, and that they preferred the rites of the neighbouring nations, is evident from the whole of their history till the time of the Babylonish captivity. When Moses only stayed longer on mount Sinai than they expected, they made the figure of a calf, after the manner of the Egyptians, for the object of their worship, though they had just before been expressly forbidden to do any such thing; and their relapses into the idolatrous rites of their neighbours, notwithstanding repeated judgments calculated to wean them from them, continued till the period above mentioned.

The priests of Baal, not those of Jehovah, had the advantage of the prejudices of the people in their favour; and in several reigns the authority of the kings and of the nobles were added to it. In the reign of Manasseh the worship of Baal was set up in the temple itself. How then could it have been in the power of the few and persecuted prophets of Jehovah to supplant them, and re-establish a mode of worship to which the generality of the people were so extremely averse, but by the power of miracles? If there be any fact in history more clearly established than any other, it is this, of the proneness of the Hebrew nation to the idolatrous rites of their neighbours; and yet after their captivity in Babylon, when they saw the complete
overthrow

overthrow of that state, which was more addicted to idol worship than any other in the whole world, and also the fulfilment of the prophecies of Moses and Jeremiah, both in their own punishment, and in their deliverance, they reverted to the observance of their religion, when it was most natural to expect, they would entirely have abandoned and forgotten it, and they have not swerved from the firmest attachment to it to this day.

All the knowledge of which the Jewish priests were possessed was contained in the books of their law, which were equally open to all the people, and which were recited to them every seventh year at the feast of Tabernacles. In the heathen religions there were *mysteries*, and *secrets*, but in that of the Jews there were none.

Had the Jewish priests been a body of men, who, like the Jesuits, filled up the vacancies of their own corps, there might have been a succession of able men among them, capable of imposing upon, and leading, the common people; but as the Jewish priesthood was hereditary, and ability is not so, many of them must have been weak men, who would probably have divulged any secrets, if there had been any in the order.

Besides, in times of degeneracy, many of the Jewish priests, as well as of the people, apostatized to the worship of other gods; and the prophets

prophets denounced the heaviest judgments against them on that account, so that they had every motive to expose a fraud if they had known of any. But nothing of this kind appears, any more than in the case of Judas with respect to Christ. Notwithstanding the frequent apostacies of the bulk of the Hebrew nation (in which princes, priests and people were equally involved) from the worship of their own God, it by no means appears that they at any time disbelieved the miracles recorded in the books of Moses; but, like all other people in those times, they were willing to believe that the claims of different deities were not wholly incompatible with each other, and the religious festivals and rites of their neighbours were far more alluring than their own. And how common is it for men's practice, and even their reason, to bend to the side of inclination.

With less pretence can it be said that priestcraft was concerned in the promulgation of christianity. That the Jews in general were indisposed to receive the new religion can never be questioned. We see the most inveterate prejudice against it in that nation to this day, and what advantage could such a man as an illiterate carpenter, and a few fishermen have over the Jewish scribes and priests? Neither Jesus nor the apostles were priests, or possessed of any more knowledge than other persons of their low station

tion in their country. Indeed, no case can be stated, in which men had less natural advantage for imposing upon others than they had.

The truth of christianity being once established by unquestionable miracles, and such a rigorous scrutiny of all the facts on which it rested, as no other facts ever underwent, and an order of priesthood being founded upon it, worldly-minded men, becoming priests, took advantage, no doubt, of the popular credulity to promote their own interest. But this was long after the establishment of christianity, and therefore is to be ascribed to the *abuses* of it, and not to the thing itself, the true principles of which may be seen in the New Testament; and it is evident they afford no just ground for any such abuses, the whole object of christianity being to train men up to virtue here and happiness hereafter. Nothing is easier than to trace the rise and progress of the influence of priests among christians, and the whole of it was unquestionably subsequent to the promulgation of christianity; so that to ascribe the establishment of this religion to priestcraft, is to mistake the effect, and an accidental and late effect, for the cause.

SECTION

SECTION VII.

Of the Spirit and moral Influence, of Infidelity, as exemplified in the Correspondence between Voltaire and D'Alembert.

THE great end of religion is to improve the nature of man, and thereby add to his happiness. With respect to *intellect*, men and brute animals are born in the same state, having the same external senses, which are the only inlets to all ideas, and consequently the source of all the knowledge, and of all the mental habits, they ever acquire; and for some time the brute advances with more rapidity than the man. A dog acquires much useful knowledge in a short time, while a child seems to have learned nothing; and yet, after a few years, how much superior is the child, while the dog makes no sensible advances at all?

To what can this difference be owing, but to a difference with respect to the various associations of the ideas, originally the very same, by which those in the mind of the man become so modified, as to be properly termed *intellectual*, while those of the other remain almost wholly sensual, the gratification of the senses being their principal object; whereas in some men of
highly

highly cultivated minds, they almost cease to be any object at all; there being no pains of sense, as those of hunger and thirst, those occasioned by heat or cold, by the most extreme fatigue, or whatever can affect the body in the most disagreeable manner, that they will not cheerfully undergo, and for a great length of time, in order to gain some object of which a mere brute has no conception, and of which the man himself had no idea when he began his career. He shall even wholly lose sight of himself, and of his individual interest of every kind, and pursue an object that has little or no relation to his own happiness (though it may be ultimately productive of it) and the happiness of others shall be more directly in his view than his own.

Men also have many ideas which are so remote from those of sense, that it is with great difficulty that they can be traced to them; so that their real origin was unknown till it was discovered by the wonderful sagacity of Dr. Hartley; while other metaphysicians and philosophers maintain that we do not acquire them by any of the external, but by some internal senses. I mean those ideas which are called *abstract*.

That brute animals are, however, capable of much mental improvement, we see in the strong attachment they have for their young, and the affection that dogs, more especially, have
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for their masters. But they do not seem capable of acquiring any ideas of invisible objects, or of very abstract or complex ideas*; owing, probably, to their want of the power of articulation, or speech. They can express their *sensations*, their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, in the clearest manner; but they do not seem to have any mode of expressing *particular ideas*, and therefore they are incapable of discoursing by words or signs, and this is the great instrument of improvement in man, as well as more compass of brain.

On this account it does not seem possible to give a brute animal an idea of a God, or of a future state, which are as easily acquired by men, and even by children that can speak, as any other ideas whatever. And in proportion to the number and variety of our ideas, and their combinations, and consequently their remoteness from the elements of which they were composed, is our advancement in intellectual excellence. For in this proportion we recede the farther from mere sense. According to the principles of Dr. Hartley, deduced from the

* That brute animals have some ideas that are properly ABSTRACT, or GENERAL (if they can be called IDEAS) and not corresponding to any individual object which they have seen before, is evident from dogs pursuing hares, and other animals of the same species, or of similar species with those that they have been used to pursue, and their avoiding others, which they have found by experience to be able to overpower, and disposed to hurt, them.

most accurate observations, the ultimum of human attainment in this progress, through the successive stages of *sensation, imagination, ambition, and self-interest*, is when a regard to the *good of others*, the supposed *will of God*, and a sense of abstract *right*, commonly called *conscience*, or *the moral sense*, shall instantly, and without reflection, determine a man's conduct; so that his actions proceeding from these principles shall be *secondarily automatic*. So perfectly will they be directed to these ends, that all the intermediate links of their connection with them shall be obliterated, as the scaffolding is taken down when the edifice is completed.

With these principles every real philosopher is well acquainted, and therefore they must be here taken for granted, and by these we must compare the state of mind naturally acquired by the believer in revelation with that of those who disbelieve it. And I think the great superiority of the former to the latter cannot fail to be manifest, as also that men are happier in themselves, and more disposed to promote the happiness of others, in proportion as they are governed by this faith. On the other hand, the minds and characters of those persons who are destitute of it, whatever other objects they may have, and whatever success they may have in the pursuit of them, will appear to be justly denomi-

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nated

nated *low* and *mean*, the reverse of what is *great*, *dignified*, and *noble*, in the character of rational beings.

This I have shewn, and I hope, satisfactorily, in the first of my *Discourses on the Evidences of Revelation*, and in some measure, in a preceding section, and therefore I shall not repeat the arguments here; but I shall illustrate them by examples from such of the writings of the more eminent unbelievers as will be deemed to be the fairest indication of their real sentiments and feelings. And I think that, with respect to Voltaire, who is the father of the greatest part of the infidelity of the present age*, we cannot fail to find these in his correspondence with D'Alembert, to whom he wrote without the least disguise, as to a brother and a friend; as D'Alembert, a man of a similar turn, though a somewhat graver character, did to him. On any sentiments in the other correspondences of these celebrated writers, I do not lay much stress, as they may be supposed to have had motives to write otherwise than they really thought; and it will appear that they made no scruple of doing this when it answered their purpose.

* He is called by the king of Prussia, whose compliments, in his correspondence with him, are fulsome in the extreme, 'the divine patriarch of unbelievers.' Posthumous works, vol. x. p. 71. That the one could offer, and the other receive, such gross flattery, is a sufficient indication of the low state of both their minds. See particularly, vol. x. p. 50, 60, 63, 65, 72, 78, 108, and 118.

We see in these Letters, that it was the great object of Voltaire from early life, and continued to be so with unabated, nay with increasing, zeal to the very end of it, to overturn the system of revealed religion, and without substituting, like the deists in England, any principles of natural religion in its place. He was perpetually boasting of the progress that was made in this work. He felt deeply every thing that tended to obstruct it; he was continually urging his friends to join him in it, and he spared no means, short of suffering and dying in the cause, to promote it. But he made no scruple of dissimbling, or of using any artifice, to avoid persecution. He never, however, endeavoured to overturn the Jewish or christian revelations by serious argument, but chiefly used, and recommended, ridicule. Though the subject be of infinite importance, and though he evidently did not suppose that there was any foundation for the hope of a future life but on the principles of christianity, he always treated it with the greatest levity, never once expressing any regret, or concern, that so great and glorious a prospect must be abandoned; and though he was not, like D'Alembert, wholly an unbeliever in the being of a God, he had no faith in a *providence*, or professed to have any respect to a Supreme Being in his conduct. Despairing of much success except with men of letters, and men of fashion, he discovers the greatest indifference,

and even contempt, for the common people, as not worth enlightening.

That these are just inferences from the correspondence above mentioned, will appear from the extracts that I shall give from it; and though they will be numerous, they will not, I think, be thought tedious, being written in Voltaire's best manner, which was always peculiarly lively and entertaining, even when his conceptions were ever so false, and the temper that he discovered the most to be condemned.

I wish the disposition of mind with which Voltaire and his correspondent wrote may be compared with that of the apostle Paul, and other preachers of christianity. These, having the highest idea of the importance of their office, and the greatest compassion and respect for mankind, all of whom they considered as children of the same God and Father with themselves, and heirs of the same immortality, and whom they saw to be miserably bewildered in error and superstition, and immersed in gross vices arising from that superstition, spared no pains, and declined no risk, or suffering, even that of death itself, in order to enlighten their minds, and reform their conduct, with a view to their future happiness. Justly estimating the importance of a future and endless state of being, they treated so serious a subject with the greatest seriousness. Firmly believing in the
existence

existence and constant providence of God, whom they considered as a Being of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, they had a respect to him in all their conduct, and were wholly resigned to his will, in living, suffering, and dying. If any person be insensible of the great superiority of this character to that which is discovered by Voltaire, and most unbelievers, I can have no hope that any reasoning, or representations, of mine will make the impression that I could wish, and therefore, to all such persons my writing will be in vain.

It is remarkable, that through the whole of this correspondence, both Voltaire and D'Alembert confound popery with christianity, though it appears that they had heard of *Socinians*, and no doubt of other christians, who disclaimed the popish doctrines. D'Alembert, says*, vol. i. p. 212, 'In a little time mankind will have
' sense enough to comprehend of themselves,
' that *three* are not *one*, and that *bread* is not a
' *God*.' Surely it became these *philosophers*, as they always exclusively call themselves and their friends, to have examined a little farther, and to have enquired whether all the absurdities, and all the evils, which they lay to the charge of christianity, really belong to *it*, and not rather

* The quotations are from the edition of "Voltaire's Works" published after his death, the edition in 12mo. the volumes quoted being the three which contain his correspondence with D'Alembert.

to the corruptions and abuses of it. But these things they perpetually confound, and on this pretence exclaim against the whole system.

Condorcet, in his *Life of Voltaire*, says, p. 192, ‘ his zeal against a religion which he regarded as the cause of the fanaticism which had desolated Europe, from its rise, of the superstition which had brutalized it, and as a source of the evils which those enemies to humanity continued still to occasion, seemed to double his activity and his strength. I am tired, said he, one day, with hearing it repeated that twelve men were sufficient to establish christianity, and I am desirous of shewing them that one man only is wanting to destroy it.’

According to the same testimony, Voltaire’s zeal in the same cause had suffered no abatement when he visited Paris the last time, which was near to his death. ‘ In the midst of the acclamations of the theatre, he had observed,’ p. 192, ‘ with secret pleasure, that the verses which were the most applauded were those in which he attacked superstition, and the names which it had consecrated. It was to this object that he referred all the homage that he received. He saw in the general admiration, a proof of the empire which he had obtained over their minds, the fall of prejudice, which was his work.’

But

But perhaps Voltaire's own language will give a clearer idea of the vehemence of his zeal against christianity; and it is necessary to observe, that in this correspondence he does not always express himself in words at length, but, having once designated christianity by the phrase *infamous fanaticism*, he generally only writes *l'inf*— for it. I therefore shall not scruple to translate it accordingly. Speaking of the opposition that was made by the clergy to the publication of the *Encyclopedie*, he says, vol. ii. p. 213, ‘ Let us only have the consolation of regarding with an excess of horror and of contempt the contemptible and horrible rascals. I do not know whether I explain myself. I love you, as much as I abhor them.’ Again, he says, vol. ii. p. 68, ‘ Hold this system in execration, and love me. Persecuting monsters,’ vol. i. p. 111, ‘ give me only seven or eight persons that I can command, and I will exterminate you.’

It was the subject of great concern to Voltaire, that the enemies of religion could not agree to act together. “ ’Tis pity,” he says, vol. ii. p. 14, ‘ that there should be discord in the camp of philosophy, when it is on the point of taking Troy. Let us at least have nothing to reproach ourselves with that can hurt the common cause.’

Voltaire

Voltaire had the greatest contempt imaginable for Rousseau; saying, vol. ii. p. 316, ‘ he
 ‘ did not know a more contemptible mounte-
 ‘ bank than he was, and that he would not spare
 ‘ him, but humble the pride of that Diogenes.’
 Yet thinking he might be of some service to
 the common cause, he says, vol. ii. p. 16, ‘ It is
 ‘ pity that Jean Jaques, Diderot, Helvetius, and
 ‘ yourself, with others *ejusdem farinae*, cannot
 ‘ act together, to crush superstition. The great-
 ‘ est of my griefs is to see imposture united, and
 ‘ the friends of truth divided. Fight, my dear
 ‘ Bellerophon, and destroy the Chimera.’ Again,
 ‘ mentioning Rousseau, he says, vol. ii. p. 9,
 ‘ This is prodigiously ridiculous. So are most
 ‘ things in this world. But I overlook every
 ‘ thing, provided the infamous superstition be
 ‘ cried down, as it ought to be, by all persons
 ‘ of condition, and that it be abandoned to foot-
 ‘ men, and servant girls, as it ought to be.’

D’Alembert had pleaded for Rousseau, as
 having merit in this way, though justly censur-
 able in other respects ‘ If Rousseau,’ he says,
 vol. i. p. 174, ‘ is persecuted, it is for having
 ‘ thrown some stones, and very good ones, at
 ‘ the infamous fanaticism which you wish to
 ‘ have crushed, and which is the burden of the
 ‘ song in all your letters, as the destruction of
 ‘ Carthage was of all the speeches of Cato in the
 ‘ Roman senate.’

Voltaire

Voltaire was continually exhorting his friends to exert themselves in every possible way to overturn christianity. ‘By what fate is it,’ he says, vol. ii. p. 28, ‘that so many fanatical mad-men have founded sects, and so many superior spirits can scarce found a small school of reason. It is perhaps because they are not mad. They want enthusiasm and activity. All the philosophers are too lukewarm. They content themselves with laughing at the errors of men, when they ought to crush them. Missionaries traverse land and sea, philosophers might at least go over the streets. They must sow the good seed from house to house. Preaching does more than the writings of the fathers. Acquit yourself, dear brother, of both these duties. Preach and write, combat, convert, make the fanatics so odious and contemptible, that the government shall be ashamed to support them.’

He particularly laments the inactivity of his correspondent D’Alembert, and urges him to exert his great talents, especially in irony, in the cause. ‘You bury your talents,’ he says, vol. i. p. 331, ‘you are content with despising the monster which you ought to abhor, and destroy. What would it cost you to crush it in four pages, having the modesty too not to let it know that it died by your hand. It belongs to Meleager to kill the wild boar. Throw the
‘javelin

‘javelin without shewing the hand. Sometime
 ‘or other do me this pleasure. Comfort me in
 ‘my old age. Defend the good cause,’ vol. i.
 p. 344, ‘*pugnis, unquibus et rostro.* Animate
 ‘the brethren. Continue to coax the fools and
 ‘the knaves’ ‘One hand like yours,’ vol. i.
 p. 423, ‘might serve to crush the monsters of
 ‘superstition and fanaticism; and when we can
 ‘render this service to mankind, without com-
 ‘mitting ourselves, I think we ought in con-
 ‘science to do it. I ask this small service of
 ‘you as a favour, and the rest as justice.’

‘Men will get light,’ vol. ii. p. 179, ‘in
 ‘spite of the tygers and the apes. You are not
 ‘willing to be a martyr; but be a confessor.
 ‘Your words will have more weight than a
 ‘pile. My dear philosopher,’ constantly cry
 ‘aloud like the devil. I love you as much as I
 ‘hate those monsters. Adieu, my dear illustri-
 ‘ous master,’ vol. ii. p. 233, ‘continue to com-
 ‘bat as you do, *pro aris et focis.* As for me, I
 ‘have my hands tied up by ministerial and sa-
 ‘cerdotal despotism. I can only do like Moses,
 ‘lift up my hands to heaven while you are
 ‘fighting.’ ‘They say, vol. ii. p. 238, ‘we
 ‘shall soon have many curious things, which
 ‘will do much good, in which all men of letters
 ‘will be interested. You, my friend, who are
 ‘at their head, pray to God that the devil may
 ‘be crushed, and, as far as prudence will per-
 ‘mit, put your hand to this holy work.

In

In proportion to Voltaire's great zeal in the cause of infidelity, was his joy in the success of his labours, of which he makes frequent boasts. 'Reason,' he says, vol. i. p. 315, 'makes great progress. You perceive,' vol. ii. p. 67, 'that fanaticism foams with rage, in proportion as the day begins to shine.' He particularly triumphs in the great progress infidelity had made of late years. 'Philosophy,' vol. i. p. 313, 'has made a wonderful progress the last five or six years. It must be confessed,' vol. ii. p. 12, 'that reason has made terrible progress in the last thirty years. It will do so every day.' This was written in 1765.

He and his correspondent congratulate one another on the number of *books* which served to promote the cause they had so much at heart. 'They rain upon us,' says D'Alembert, vol. ii. p. 171, 'from Holland with works without number against fanaticism. They seem resolved to besiege the city in form, so many red hot balls are thrown into it. There are more than thirty publications,' vol. ii. p. 176, 'in the last two years, which are dispersed through all Europe. It continues to rain as if it would pour in books against the priesthood,' vol. ii. p. 209, 'We have had a number of good books the last thirty years,' says Voltaire, vol. i. p. 376. 'They must do much good. The progress of reason is rapid in our cantons.'

He

He frequently mentions the particular countries and places in which infidelity made the greatest or the most unexpected progress. 'You will find,' he says, vol. i. p. 325, 'that Geneva makes great progress. There are more philosophers than Socinians in it. Fanaticism begins to appear terrible from one end of Europe to the other. Imagine to yourself a Spanish nobleman, a stranger, writing to me a letter altogether anti-fanatical, to ask for arms against this monster, in spite of the holy brotherhood.' vol. ii. p. 22.

D'Alembert, writing to Voltaire, says, vol. ii. p. 232, 'There are compliments for you from the queen of Sweden, and the prince royal, who protect in the North that philosophy which is so ill received by the princes of the South. Mr. Jennings will tell you what progress reason has made in Sweden, under these happy auspices.'

These philosophers congratulate one another most of all on the patronage that was given to infidelity by princes, from whose influence they promised themselves the greatest success. 'I hope,' says Voltaire, vol. ii. p. 169, 'that these rascals of theologians will become so ridiculous, that they will not be able to do any hurt. Our Russian empress leads the way finely. Their last days are at hand in Poland. They are already come in Prussia, and the North of Germany'

‘ Germany. The houses of Austria and Bavaria
‘ are almost the only ones that support these pe-
‘ dants. There is,’ he says, vol. ii. p. 334,
‘ something like a Decian persecution against
‘ our primitive church, but we have for us, the
‘ emperor of China,, the empress Catharine II.
‘ the king of Prussia, the king of Denmark, the
‘ queen of Sweden, and her son, many princes
‘ of the empire, and all England. God will
‘ have pity on his flock.’

Voltaire did not, however, expect that his philosophy would make much progress among the common people. But this he thought of little consequence, provided it was received by persons of the higher classes.’ ‘ There are,’ he says, vol. ii. p. 28, ‘ few persons who think.
‘ My old royal disciple says there are not more
‘ than one in a thousand, which is nearly the
‘ proportion of good company. But there will
‘ be ten times as many in ten years more. A
‘ great revolution in the minds of men is an-
‘ nounced every day.’ Let us, vol. II. p. 146,
‘ bless this happy revolution which has taken
‘ place in the minds of all persons of condition
‘ within these fifteen or twenty years. It has
‘ surpassed my hopes.’ We approach, vol. I.
‘ p. 343, ‘ the times in which men begin to be
‘ rational. But when I say *men*, I do not mean
‘ the populace (*canaille*) and the great chamber,
‘ or the assembly of the clergy, I mean the
‘ men

‘ men who govern, and who are born to go-
‘ vern. I mean the men of letters who are
‘ worthy of the name.”

On many occasions Voltaire expresses great contempt for the common people, as if it was of little consequence whether their minds were enlightened or not. Having said, as before, that the great revolution exceeded his hopes, he adds, vol. ii. p. 146, ‘ As to the common-
‘ ality (*canaille*) I do not trouble myself about
‘ them. They will always be the same. I cul-
‘ tivate my garden. There will always be toads,
‘ but they do not hinder the singing of my
‘ nightingales.’ Speaking of a third person, he says, vol. ii. p. 205, ‘ he ought to be content,
‘ and you too, with the contempt with which
‘ superstition is fallen with the people of con-
‘ dition in Europe. It is all that could be
‘ wished, or that was necessary. We never pre-
‘ tended to enlighten cobblers, and servant maids.
‘ That was the business of the apostles. It is
‘ true there are people who risked martyrdom
‘ as they did, but God had pity upon them.
‘ We shall soon, vol. ii. p. 231. ‘ have *new*
‘ *heavens and a new earth*. I mean for people
‘ of condition. As for the populace (*canaille*)
‘ the most stupid heavens and the most stupid
‘ earth is all that is necessary for them. Adieu
‘ my dear friend,’ vol. ii. p. 362. ‘ I recommend
‘ to you to have courage, and much contempt
‘ for

‘ for mankind. I make too classes of men’ vol. ii. p. 381. ‘ the oppressing and the oppressed. ‘ I hate the one, and I despise the other.’

The king of Prussia expresses the same contempt for the common people. ‘ The vulgar,’ he says, *Posthumous works*, vol. x. p. 4, ‘ do not deserve to be enlightened. ‘ We must be content ‘ with thinking for ourselves, and give free scope ‘ to the ideas of the vulgar.’ *ib.* p. 63. How much more sublimity, as well as benevolence, is there in the doctrine of the scriptures, which represents all men as brethren, being equally the children of God, training up in the same school of moral discipline here, and alike heirs of immortality hereafter.

Notwithstanding these declarations of contempt for the common people, Voltaire would have been glad to have gained them to his party if he could; so that his conduct with respect to them resembles that of the fox with respect to the grapes. Speaking of the treatise entitled *Bon Sens** (*Good Sense*) he says, vol. iii.

* This is a treatise written in the most loose and declamatory manner, chiefly directed against the doctrines of popery. In every other respect, the contents correspond very little with the title. As to the proper evidence of christianity, I do not know that this writer has advanced any thing more plausible than the following, p. 134, 135, ‘ The miracles of the ‘ apostles, if they had been wrought, must have procured them partizans enow ‘ to secure them from the ill treatment they met with. ‘ How can we believe ‘ that missionaries protected by God, and invested with his power, should not ‘ have worked a miracle so simple as that of withdrawing themselves from ‘ the cruelty of their persecutors. To say that God willed that his religion ‘ should be sealed with blood, is to say that God is a weak, an unjust, an un-
‘ grateful

p. 147, ' I think as you do of it. It appears
' to me to be a more terrible book than the
' *Système de la Nature*. If it was abridged,
' which it will well bear to be, and sold for six
' fous, so as to be purchased and read by cooks,
' I do not know how the kitchens of the clergy
' would fare for it.'

Zealous as Voltaire was in the cause of infidelity, he was not willing that he or his friends should *suffer* much for it. ' The book ascribed
' to Freret,' he says, vol. ii. p. 88. ' and which
perhaps is his, ' does a prodigious deal of good!
' There are many confessors, but I hope there
' will be no martyrs.' With respect to himself,
he says, vol. iii. p. 158. I ' love truth very much,
' but I do not love martyrdom at all.'

His correspondent had as little affection for martyrdom as his *master*, for so he always calls Voltaire. ' I am very willing, he says, vol. ii.
p. 71. ' to serve the cause of reason, but I
' desire still more to be at my ease. Men are
' not worth the pains we take to enlighten
' them; and even those who think as we do
' persecute us. ' As for me,' he says, vol. iii.
p. 201. ' I begin to be tired, and ashamed, of
' all that I hear said, that I see done, and that
' I have the misfortune to read. I should be

' grateful, or a sanguinary being; and that he unworthily sacrifices his mis-
' sionaries to the views of his ambition.' Surely, it cannot be necessary, in
this AGE OF REASON, to reply to such arguments as these.

I do

‘ tempted to say, and do something too, but
 ‘ I forbear to write, for fear of being burned.
 ‘ Do you know that I should be afraid for you,
 ‘ if you were at Collicure, instead of Ferney,
 ‘ lest the holy brotherhood should carry you off
 ‘ against the law of nations, to burn you ac-
 ‘ cording to the rules of the canon law. Alas,
 ‘ I laugh, though I have little desire to do it.
 ‘ I had better conclude as I should have begun,
 ‘ with saying nothing, but embracing you with
 ‘ grief and affection.”

Voltaire more than once thought himself in danger, and he availed himself more of his address than of his courage on those occasions. ‘ There is a brief of the pope,’ he says, vol. ii. p. 236, ‘ in which I am evidently pointed at, so that I was at the same time in danger of a *letter de cachet*, and of the greater excommunication. But what can calumny do against innocence? Sometimes, it can burn a person, you will say. Yes there are examples of it in your holy religion; but not having the vocation of a martyr, I have enrolled myself among the confessors.’

He was more particularly alarmed when the *Philosophical Dictionary*, which he certainly wrote, was generally ascribed to him. The manner in which, on this occasion, he expressed himself to his friend, is not a little remarkable. But it appears that he was apprehensive lest his
 letters

letters should be intercepted. 'It is true,' vol. i. p. 409, 'I have read this diabolical Dictionary. 'It has frightened me, as it has done you. But 'my greatest affliction is that there are christians so unworthy of that glorious name, as 'to suspect me to be the author of a work so 'anti-christian.' I conjure you, 'vol. i. p. 411, 'to believe that I have had no hand in it. It 'neither serves me,' vol. i. p. 413, 'nor the 'cause of truth to ascribe this work to me. I 'believe there are but few copies of this abominable alphabet in Paris, and that they are not 'in dangerous hands. But when there shall be 'the least danger, I beg of you to inform me of 'it, that I may disclaim the work in all the 'public papers, with my usual candour and innocence. My dear and great philosopher, I 'conjure you to affirm, on your share in paradise, 'that your brother has no hand in this Dictionary: for he swears that he has not composed that infamous work, and he ought to be 'believed with respect to it; and the brethren 'must not be persecuted. 'It is not an infamous lie that I propose to my brother, but 'an officious clamour, the essential service of 'declaring, that this work, which I disclaim, is 'not mine. It is to disarm the tongue of calumny, and the hand of persecution.' 'You 'ask me, vol. i. p. 426, 'why I am so uneasy about a book in which I had no concern. 'It

‘ It is because it is ascribed to me. It is because
 ‘ by order of the king the procureur-general is
 ‘ actually preparing a requisitory. It is because
 ‘ at the age of seventy-one, sick, and almost
 ‘ blind, I am about to suffer the most violent per-
 ‘ secution; and lastly, because I am about to die
 ‘ a martyr, for a book which I have not written.’

His friend did not fail to second his views
 by boldly affirming what he, no doubt, believed
 to be false. ‘ If,’ he says, vol. i. p. 419, ‘ it only
 ‘ depend upon declaring that the work is not
 ‘ yours, do not be uneasy. I answer for it, like
 ‘ Crispin, with as wide a mouth as you can de-
 ‘ fire. It is evident, as I have told you, that
 ‘ this production of darkness, is the work of the
 ‘ devil in three persons, or of a person in three
 ‘ devils.’

The manner in which Voltaire had the ad-
 dress to extricate himself when threatened by
 the bishop of Annecy, who had been a mason,
 went afterwards into holy orders, and was gra-
 dually advanced to a bishoprick, shews that he
 thought nothing unlawful, or unworthy of him,
 in order to ensure his safety. ‘ See, I pray you,
 ‘ a pious fraud,’ vol. ii. p. 236, ‘ I receive in my
 ‘ bed the *viaticum*, brought me by my curé, atten-
 ‘ ded by the heads of my parish. I then declare
 ‘ before God, that the bishop of Annecy is a ca-
 ‘ lumniator, and have it registered by a notary.
 ‘ On this my mason of Annecy is in a rage,

‘ my good curé, my pious confessor, and my no-
 ‘ tary. What do they? they assemble privately, a
 ‘ fortnight after, and draw up an act, in which
 ‘ they declare upon oath, that they heard me
 ‘ make a confession of my faith, not that of
 ‘ the vicar of Savoy, but that of all the curés in
 ‘ Savoy. It was in reality in the style of a
 ‘ clumsy chimney sweeper. They send this
 ‘ writing to the mason, without saying any
 ‘ thing of it to me, and come afterwards to con-
 ‘ jure me not to disown it. They agree to
 ‘ take a false oath to draw their necks out of the
 ‘ collar. I tell them they damn themselves. I
 ‘ give them something to drink, and they are
 ‘ satisfied.

The better to screen himself from danger,
 Voltaire employed a Jesuit to say mass for him.
 ‘ There are,’ he says, vol. i. p. 313, ‘ eleven Je-
 ‘ suits at Marseilles, and one who says mass to
 me.’ And when he was at the point of death,
 he did not scruple to make a confession of the
 Catholic faith, which it had been the great busi-
 ness of his life to ridicule and explode. Con-
 dorcet says in his *Life*, p. 198, that ‘ the Abbe
 ‘ Gautier received from him a confession of his
 ‘ faith, in which he declared that he died in the
 ‘ Catholic religion, in which he was born.’

Artifice and concealment was the method
 which Voltaire and his friends, who disliked per-
 secution, chose to make use of, in order to pro-
 gagate

pogate their sentiments. One of these methods was to prefix false names to books. Voltaire mentions one, vol. i. p. 268, to which that of Boulanger then dead, would be put. Speaking of Helvetius, he says, vol. ii. p. 22, ‘ Did he not
‘ know that one may dispatch superstition with-
‘ out engraving one’s name on the dagger with
‘ which it is killed.’

Voltaire expresses peculiar satisfaction with a work of D’Alembert’s written in this manner. ‘ My dear philosopher,’ vol. ii. p. 20, ‘ your
‘ work is like yourself, it is impossible not to find
‘ you out at the second page. You will have
‘ the pleasure at the same time of the most com-
‘ plete success, and that of denying that you
‘ have rendered the public this service, before
‘ knaves and fools, who do not deserve that you
‘ should take the trouble to laugh at them.’

D’Alembert entirely adopts his master’s maxims on this subject, or rather was before him in them. ‘ You are in the right, my dear mas-
‘ ter,’ vol. ii. p. 166, ‘ people of condition can
‘ only combat by hiding themselves behind
‘ hedges; but thence they may fire with effect on
‘ the wild beasts that infest the country. You
‘ blame me,’ vol. i. p. 420, ‘ for saying of Bayle’s
‘ Dictionary. It would have been well if he
‘ had more respected religion and morals. But
‘ in the cursed country in which we write, these
‘ phrases are things of course, and only serve as
‘ supports

‘ supports to the truths we wish to establish elsewhere. Nobody is deceived by them.’

They thought by adopting these methods they gained their point better than by more direct attacks upon religion, or than by persecution. ‘ You reproach us,’ says D’Alembert, vol. i. p. 268, ‘ with our indifference ; but I think I told you that the fire of the faggots is very refreshing. Mankind are more enlightened because we have had the precaution, or the good fortune, to enlighten them by degrees.

Notwithstanding this language, which speaks much moderation, it is sufficiently evident from this correspondence, that neither Voltaire the master, nor D’Alembert the disciple, would have been much displeased if some mischief had befallen their enemies, and that it would have given them some pleasure to have promoted it. ‘ There is,’ says Voltaire, vol. ii. p. 50, ‘ a friar who has a farm on my estate at Tournay. He comes hither sometimes. I promise myself the pleasure of putting him in the pillory as soon as I am well ; a pleasantry which philosophers may take with such priests, without being persecutors, as they are.’

His correspondent shews the same disposition. For after reading, and of course admiring, Voltaire’s letter relating to the Servens, who had been cruelly treated by the Catholic priests, he says, vol. ii. p. 23, ‘ I shed tears over it, I read it again

‘ again and again, and concluded with wishing to
‘ see all the fanatics in the fire into which they
‘ wished to throw other people.’ The king of
Prussia, alluding probably to the same fact, says,
in a letter to Voltaire (Posthumous Works, vol.
x. p. 69) ‘ I would make the tonsured executi-
‘ oners, who persecute you, disappear from the
‘ face of the earth, if it was in my power to effect
‘ it.’

This was not the sentiment of Christ, or the
apostles. Jesus exhorted his disciples to *bleſs*
them that cursed them, and to pray for them that
despitefully used them and persecuted them. And
Paul advised his converts not *to render evil for*
evil, but to overcome evil with good.

Having reproached his adversaries with too
much justice, as persecutors, Voltaire takes some
pains to ward off a similar charge against his
friends. ‘ It is foolish,’ he says, vol. i. p. 367,
‘ to say that when the philosophers are in power,
‘ they will tolerate no religion but their own ;
‘ as if philosophers could ever persecute, or have
‘ it in their power to persecute. They will cer-
‘ tainly not destroy the christian religion, but
‘ christianity will not destroy them. Their
‘ numbers will continually increase. The
‘ young persons destined to fill the chief places
‘ will be enlightened, religion will become less
‘ barbarous, and society more pleasant. They
‘ will prevent the priests from corrupting reli-
‘ gion

‘ gion and morals. They will render the fanatics abominable, and the superstitious ridiculous. In one word, philosophy can only be of use to kings, to the law, and to the citizens.’

Again he says, vol. i. p. 389, ‘ I seriously lament the persecution which philosophers and philosophy are certainly going to experience. Have you not a sovereign contempt for your France, when you read the Greek and Roman histories? Do you find a single man persecuted at Rome, from Romulus to Constantine, for his manner of thinking? Would the Senate have put a stop to the Encyclopedie?’

A man must be little read in history, not to know that the Roman Senate, and the Roman people, as well as the Roman emperors, were persecutors. It was not by the heathen populace only that the Christians suffered. The Roman laws, solemnly enacted by the senate and people, forbade the exercise of all foreign religions; and it was for disobedience to these antient laws, that Nero, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and other emperors, as well as Decius, and Dioclesian, persecuted the Christians.

As to the heathen philosophers, they were so far from pleading in favour of toleration, that they were often the principal promoters of the persecutions. No heathen philosopher can be

be shewn to have been an advocate for toleration till the empire became christian. Then, indeed, Libanius advanced some liberal sentiments on the subject. But in this there could not be much merit, when at that time the heathens themselves were at the mercy of the governing powers, and might be apprehensive of being exposed to that persecution by which they had made the Christians suffer for near three hundred years.

That such a degree of hatred as Voltaire and other unbelievers express against christianity, as having in their opinion been the cause of the greatest mischiefs to which human society had ever been subject, would not lead them to endeavour its extirpation by other means than those of argumentation, or ridicule, is more than I would answer for. According to Condorcet, *Life of Voltaire*, p. 214, Voltaire thought that ‘the influence of religion had corrupted morals, but had never contributed to improve them.’ And when any end is much wished for, few persons are very scrupulous about the means which they think necessary to accomplish it. In such cases as these plausible pretences are too easily found.

If there be any such thing as serious subjects for the contemplation of man, they are those relating to *religion*, and a *future state*; and yet Voltaire never treats them in a serious manner,

manner, but with a degree of levity which can be no recommendation of his character with thinking men. The only trait of seriousness which I find in these letters upon the subject, is what he writes about the article *Memmius*, which he seems to have sent to D'Alembert, who, in his reply, did not mention it. 'You are not pleased he,' he says, vol. ii. p. 382, 'with *Memmius*, for you say not a word about it. It seems clear to me that there is an intelligence in nature; but by the imperfections and miseries of this nature, it appears to me that this intelligence is limited. But mine is so much limited, that I always fear that I do not understand what I say. I respect yours infinitely.' D'Alembert was an avowed atheist, but Voltaire was not. However, he here seems willing to compromise the matter with his correspondent by supposing the author of nature not to be that being of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness which the scriptures represent him to be, so that we could have but little satisfaction in living under the government of such a Being; since he was either unable, or unwilling, to protect and bless his worshippers, and his system terminated with this uncertain state, this mixture of good and evil.* In such a state as

* The king of Prussia would not admit that the sum of good exceeded that of evil in the world. (Posthumous Works, vol. xi. p. 62.) With such unworthy and gloomy ideas of the system, it is not at all extraordinary that he

the present, we easily see the greatest wisdom, when it is considered as a state of discipline and probation, preparatory to another; but it affords a dark and melancholy prospect, indeed, when considered as the final state of man. Voltaire looking no farther, we cannot wonder that he was dissatisfied with it, or that, without regarding any thing in a serious light, he endeavoured to amuse himself as much as he could while he continued in it. The natural maxim of all unbelievers in a future state is, *Let us eat and drink*, or do any thing else to enable us to pass the time pleasantly, *for to morrow we die.*

This great subject of *religion* Voltaire and his correspondent always treat with the most unbecoming levity. We do not find in all the writings of the former any serious argumentation about it, no examination of the state of things at the time of the promulgation of christianity, no disquisition concerning the nature of man, or of the value of testimony, in

he should have determined to put an end to his life, if the event of the war in which he was engaged with Austria had been unfortunate. (ib. vol. x. p. 170, 172.)

Writing to the Marquis D'Argens, Nov. 10th, 1760, he says, vol. x. p. 176, 'Adieu, dear Marquis, Write to me sometimes, and do not forget a poor devil who curses his fatal existence ten times a day, and who wishes he were already in the place from whence no person returns to bring any news.' Gustavus Adolphus, a true Christian hero and warrior, would not have written in this manner in such circumstances.

order

order to account for so great a number of the Jews and Gentiles, strongly prejudiced as they are known to have been in favour of the religions in which they were educated, abandoning them for another, which promised them nothing in this life, but only in a future one after death, and which required the sacrifice of every thing in this life, and sometimes of life itself, for the sake of it. Surely, this is a problem that deserves a serious solution. But it is in vain that we look for any thing serious in Voltaire, or his friend, on the subject. All that they recommend or practice, is ridicule. And what is there so grave or important, that such a writer as Voltaire could not place in a ridiculous light if he was disposed to do it? ‘My dear philosopher,’ says Voltaire, vol. ii, p. 169. ‘render those pedants as enormously ridiculous as you can in your conversation with persons of condition. It is impossible to do it from the press at Paris, but a *bon mot* is as good a thing as a good book. You ought in truth’ vol. ii. p. 250, ‘to punish those little rascals by some of those books that are half serious and half in jest, which you can write so well. Ridicule does every thing! It is the strongest of all weapons, and no person can handle it better than you. There is a great pleasure in laughing, while one takes one’s revenge. If you do

‘do not crush superstition, you fail in your
‘vocation.’

Exhortations to make themselves merry,
and to laugh at every thing, as the best thing
they could do in this world, are perpetual in
this correspondence, ‘I am always,’ says Vol-
taire, vol. i. p. 369, ‘very ill. ‘I divert my
‘sufferings with the stupidity of mankind.
‘Good night my very dear philosopher. Jest
‘with life.’ vol. ii, p. 300. ‘There is nothing
‘good but that. Our consolation,’ vol. ii. p.
369, ‘is to crush the barbarous pedants who
‘have persecuted us. They are worse treated
‘than we are. But this is the consolation of
‘the damned. Take care of your health,
‘and laugh at the whole world. It is the best
‘thing, and it is the most reputable!

To this the answers of his correspondent
are a perfect echo. ‘The chief thing, as you
‘say, is to live merrily, and, to laugh when we
‘have the address to lay them on the ground.
vol. ii. p. 167, ‘As for me’ vol. ii. p. 98, ‘I
‘will laugh, as I do, at every thing, and will
‘endeavour that nothing disturb my repose,
‘and my happiness. Adieu my dear master,’
vol. ii. p. 187, always make a jest of every
‘thing. There is nothing good but that. Adieu
‘my dear and great philosopher.’ vol. i. p. 270.
‘Keep yourself well. Laugh at the follies of
‘men. I do so as much as I can, but I have not
‘the

‘the folly to laugh too loud. We must not
‘torment ourselves about what ought to serve
‘for our amusement.’ (*menus plaisirs.*)

What I think must shock a serious mind the most, is to find men making a jest of *death*, as well as of *life*, and of every thing in it. Surely if there be a serious moment for man, whether he be a believer in a future state or not, it is when he is about to leave the world, and to bid a final adieu to all its pleasures, and all its pains. The former he will leave with regret, and the latter with satisfaction; but still his sentiments will naturally be of the more serious kind. To shut one’s eyes for ever on such a scene of things as we have been witness to, the sun, moon, and stars, this well furnished earth, our country, our friends, our pursuits, every thing that has ever been dear, and in any respect interesting, to us, and neither to visit it any more, or have any thing to supply its place, is an awful crisis.

But every person who has heard much of a future state, who has in his early life been himself a believer in it, who knows that mankind in general believe in it, and that among the believers in it there are men of as good understanding as himself, and who have perhaps made as diligent enquiries concerning it, can hardly avoid having some serious thoughts on the subject,

ject, when he thinks that he is about to die. This will more especially be the case if he believes that the world had an intelligent maker. For then he must be sensible that the great Being who made man, and placed him on this theatre of existence, is able, whenever he pleases, to re-compose him, let the parts of which he consists, be ever so much separated and dispersed, and bring him back to life again. He cannot say that a future life of *retribution* is an unsuitable sequel to such a state of *trial* and *discipline* as this evidently is; and therefore, as there are some chances in favour of such a state, even independent of revelation, he will probably not be without some degree of apprehension concerning it, when he has nothing else to look to. If he be at all acquainted with the principles, and have attended to the evidences, of christianity, which is said to *bring life and immortality to light*, his apprehensions cannot but be increased, though they should not have produced a full conviction with respect to it.

But admitting that a man should have attained the fullest assurance of there being no future state, which I cannot help thinking to be barely possible, and therefore to be the attainment of very few persons; still, as I have said, the idea of a man passing from a state of existence into absolute annihilation, will naturally give him a serious thought; and jesting and
levity

levity in such a situation, must be affectation *. And yet on this most serious of all subjects, we find Voltaire and his correspondent perpetually diverting themselves.

‘ My dear master,’ says Voltaire, vol. ii. p. 111, ‘ how much are the philosophers to be
‘ pitied. Their kingdom is not of this world,
‘ and they have no hope of reigning in any
‘ other.’ ‘ When you have a moment’s lei-
‘ sure,’ vol. iii. p. 166, ‘ inform me, I pray
‘ you, whether there be any thing to fear for
‘ unfortunate philosophy, which is always threat-
‘ ened. Ah, what have we to suffer from nature,
‘ from fortune, and from knaves and fools. I
‘ shall soon leave this wretched world, and it
‘ will be with the regret of not having been able
‘ to live with you. Manage your existence as
‘ long as you can. You are beloved and re-
‘ spected, which is the greatest of resources. It
‘ is true they do not supply the place of a female
‘ friend, but it is more than all the rest. Have
‘ superstition in execration,’ vol. ii. p. 68, ‘ and
‘ love me. Be assured, that I shall deserve it by

* For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey
This pleasing anxious being e’er resign’d;
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast a longing, ling’ring, look behind.

GRAY’S Church-Yard.

If this was the case with the ignorant rusticks of the poet, much more must it be so with philosophers, men of observation and reflection, and who have had a higher enjoyment of life.

‘ the

‘ the sentiments that I shall have for you, till
‘ the day that I shall render my body to the
‘ four elements, which will be soon; for I have
‘ continual and increasing weakness.’

His correspondent, as before, answers as a faithful echo to the same sounds. ‘ I have but a
‘ short time to live, vol. ii. p. 91, ‘ I will die, if
‘ I can, laughing.’ ‘ Several of our brethren,’ vol. ii. p. 268, ‘ are near dying. Do not you think of
‘ being their companion in the journey. You are
‘ no proper companion for them. Rather wait till
‘ we set out together. As you are not much
‘ hurried, I think I shall not make you wait
‘ long—When I shall perceive myself ready to
‘ die, I shall inform you, if I can, of the day
‘ that I shall take my place in the coach. I have
‘ just been writing to your old disciple,’ vol. iii. p. 211, ‘ that this cursed stomach does not
‘ permit me to project any other journeys than
‘ that to the other world, if there be another
‘ world, and that I shall soon wait upon his majesty on the banks of Styx; wishing, however,
‘ then to see him there soon. I have as much
‘ difficulty in digesting what I eat, as what I see
‘ and hear. I shall bid adieu without regret to
‘ a world in which so many foolish things are
‘ said and done. I am sometimes tempted to
‘ believe in a providence, when I see the fate of
‘ Cartouche, Freron, and Mandrin Childebrand;

H

‘ but

‘ but I change my opinion when I go to the
‘ necessary (*garde robe*)*.

Mr. Hume also behaved with the same affected levity, for it could not be any thing else, when he was near dying, amusing himself and his friends with imagining himself in the place of one who, in a dialogue of Lucian’s, was brought to the boat of Charon, and making all the excuses he could for staying a little longer before he stepped into it. One of them was
‘ that he might have the satisfaction of seeing
‘ the downfall of some of the prevailing systems
‘ of superstition, with respect to which, he said,
‘ he had endeavoured to open the eyes of the
‘ public.’ See the *Supplement to his Life*, by Dr. Smith.

I am much inclined to think that all these unbelievers thought more seriously on this serious subject than they would be thought to have done. If they could really behave with this levity in these circumstances, I shall think more unfavourably of their characters than I am at present disposed to do. Admitting that they did express their real sentiments and feelings, and actually met their deaths with so much indifference, and even pleasantry, how

* A man must have little of the spirit of a PHILOSOPHER, who should be inclined to disbelieve a Providence from any thing that he could see, or experience in a necessary.

much more dignified, and desirable, is the death of a christian, who humbly hoping that he has lived to good purpose, usefully with respect to others, as well as happily to himself; having hereby discharged the duty which God required of him, the great business of life being faithfully done, can look back with satisfaction on a life so well spent, and forward into an approaching eternity, with humble confidence and joy; singing the triumphant song, *O grave, where is thy victory, O death, where is thy sting.*

How much more amiable was the death of *Garzo*, the great grandfather of Petrarch, of whom we have a short account in the *Memoirs* of the latter. He was a public notary at Florence, greatly respected for his probity and his good sense, so that he was often consulted even by philosophers, and the literati of those times. ‘After having lived to the age of one hundred and four, in innocence and good works, he died, as Plato did, on the day of his birth, and in the bed in which he was born. His death resembled a quiet sleep. He expired surrounded by his family, without pain or uneasiness, while he was conversing about God and virtue.’ If any person can say that with respect to *propriety*, and true *dignity*, this was not greatly superior to the sentiments of Voltaire and Hume in the same circumstances, his feelings are very different from mine.

The king of Prussia, who had been possessed of the most ample means of mental improvement, under the pressure of infirmity and old age, often expressed his dislike, or contempt, of theology, metaphysics, mathematics and chemistry, and said his only consolation was in the *Belles Lettres*. This is like an emaciated horse rejecting the most nourishing corn, and feeding only on straw. See Posthumous Works, vol. x. p. 39, 64.

Let the sentiments of these unbelievers be compared with those of Jesus, in a near prospect of a most painful and ignominious death. When, *lifting up his eyes to heaven*, he said, John xvii. 2. *Father the hour is come. Glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee.---I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* With what a full persuasion of a favourable answer to this petition does he proceed to pray for his disciples, in the full confidence of their sharing with him in the honour and happiness that was designed for himself. v. 13, *Now come I to thee, and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.* v. 20. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they may all be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may*

may be one in us. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.

How triumphantly does the apostle Paul speak in the near view of death, ii. Tim. iv. 7. *I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* What an excellent spirit is also discovered in the second epistle of Peter, and in those of John, all written not long before their deaths. These men, having in some measure suffered with their master, had no doubt of their reigning with him, Rom. ix. 7. *and being glorified together;* and that when this scene of things should be closed, *an entrance, as Peter says, 2. Epist. i. 11, would be administered to them abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Admitting that there should be no future state, and that this was all an illusion. Surely it is more happy with respect to one's self, as well as more edifying and useful to the world, to live and die in the expectation of it; since it adds so much to the dignity and happiness of man. But the expectation is as well founded, as it is useful, consoling, and elevating.

SECTION

SECTION VIII.

Of the Ignorance or gross Misrepresentations of Unbelievers, antient and modern, with Respect to Revealed Religion.

IT is not very easy to account for the ignorance of many unbelievers, diligent inquirers, and well informed, with respect to other things, of what relates to *revelation*. I cannot account for it but from an extreme dislike, and perhaps contempt, of the subject, such as must lay a strong bias on their minds against the reception of it, and which must therefore render their opinion on the subject of little value. Some facts of this kind are very remarkable, and well deserving of attention.

In the time of Tacitus and Plutarch, there were Jews in almost every city in the Roman empire, so many at Rome, that the emperor Claudius had thought it necessary to banish them from that metropolis; tho' this banishment was not of long continuance. Wherever there were Jews, they had with them their *scriptures*, then translated into Greek, a language the most generally understood by all persons who could read. Indeed, most of the Jews themselves who lived out of Judea, made use of no other; and as they

they were at that time eager to make profelytes, they would be far from concealing their books from any person. And yet it is evident that these writers had never seen them.

Had the Carthaginians, or any other people within the bounds of the Roman empire, been known to have had writings, containing accounts of their history and antiquities, however fabulous, no historian, undertaking to give an account of them, would have omitted to make inquiry concerning those writings, and to consult them; nor would he have failed to recite their contents, whether he had given credit to them or not. It would have been deemed a want of liberal curiosity, or very culpable negligence, not to have done it. And yet Tacitus who professed to give a pretty large outline of the history of the Jews, then lately reduced by the Romans, makes no mention of their books; and gives such an account of them as no person could have done who had ever heard of their real history.

Though he was an historian of as great credit as any the Romans ever had to boast of, and he introduces his account of Jerusalem as a city of *great fame*, (*urbs famosa*) and therefore, one would think, deserving of particular attention, there is a greater appearance of fable in his account of the Jews, whose metropolis it was, than in that of any other nation whose history he undertakes to recite.

‘ The

‘ The Jews,’ he says, ‘ were originally of
‘ Crete, and had their name from mount Ida, in
‘ that island, having been first called Idæi, and
‘ then, by corruption Judæi; that when Sa-
‘ turn was expelled from the throne by Jupiter,
‘ they left that island, and settled in Lybia,
‘ which borders on Egypt; that in the reign of
‘ Isis, when Egypt was overstocked with inha-
‘ bitants, they left that country, under the
‘ conduct of two leaders, *Hieronimus* and *Juda*.
‘ Some,’ he says, ‘ ascribe a more respectable
‘ origin to the Jews; but most writers agree
‘ that in the time of a great pestilence, king
‘ Bocchoris, having consulted the oracle, was di-
‘ rected to purge his kingdom of so detestable
‘ a race of men as the Jews were; that then,
‘ under the conduct of Moses, they entered
‘ the desert, and when they were near perish-
‘ ing with thirst, they followed some asses,
‘ which led them to a watering place; and that
‘ after a journey of six days, on the seventh
‘ they seized upon some lands which they found
‘ inhabited. There they built a city, and found-
‘ ed a temple, in which they placed the image
‘ of the animal by whose means they had been
‘ saved from destruction.’ This writer did not,
however, think it probable, as he says, was
maintained by some (and among them was
Plutarch) ‘ that the Jews worshipped the God
‘ Bacchus, the conqueror of the East, because the
‘ festivals

‘ festivals of Bacchus are of a chearful nature,
‘ whereas those of the Jews are fordid as well
‘ as absurd.’

The rest of the account which this celebrated historian gives of the Jews is as wild, and as wide of the truth, as this. Had he ever seen the Septuagint translation of the books of Moses, he could not but have perceived that no history whatever, and least of all the antient ones of Greece or Rome, bear so many internal marks of genuineness, or of their having been written while the facts were recent, the particulars of persons, times, and places, being so numerous. Besides, Josephus, the friend of the emperor Titus, having written his history before that of Tacitus, he might have consulted *his* work, which is written in a manner more adapted to gain the attention of strangers, with which view it was, indeed, composed. Nothing but the most extreme and unjustifiable contempt of the Jewish nation can account for this wilful ignorance of every thing relating to them. And yet it might have been imagined that, without mentioning the reigns of David or Solomon, or any of the more splendid circumstances in the antient Jewish History, the reign of Herod the Great, whose power and opulence were well known at Rome, the long residence of king Agrippa, the friend of Caligula, in that city, and also of Berenice, the favourite

favourite of Titus, might have contributed to make this nation better known, and have rescued them from that contempt. Few other nations conquered by the Romans were able to boast of personages so conspicuous, and at the same time so well known at Rome.

It is evident that Tacitus knew no more of the christians than he did of the Jews, though they had their origin in a manner in his own time, tho' he gives a particular account of Nero's persecution of them, and speaks of them as so numerous in Rome only, that he calls them, a *great multitude*, (*ingens multitudo*) He mentions nothing concerning them but such an absurd and opprobrious general character as was given of them by the merest vulgar among the heathens of that age; calling christianity a *mischievous superstition*; (*exitiabilis superstitio*) and he mentions the universal detestation in which the christians were held (though without assigning, or hinting at, any reason for it) as made it easy for Nero to destroy them without exciting any dangerous alarm, on the false pretence of their having fired the city.

Pliny the younger, the friend and correspondent of Tacitus, governor of Bythinia under the emperor Trajan, a man of letters too, and who wrote about the time that the apostle John died, appears to have known nothing of the christians, tho' by his own account they were
so

so numerous in his own province that the public sacrifices were in a great measure discontinued, than he had collected from the examination of such of them as had been brought to his tribunal; so that it is evident, as Lardner says, that he had never seen, perhaps never heard of, any of their books; though those that compose the New Testament, and several others, were then extant, and in the hands of those who were far from being disposed to conceal them.

Whether this ignorance arose from contempt, or had any other cause, it argues a state of mind indisposed to attend to any evidence that might have been alleged in favour of the Jewish or christian religions. Indeed, this contempt, or dislike, being known, few persons would chuse to obtrude upon them any such evidence. Whatever they heard of this kind must have been by accident, and would have found them little disposed to give it a patient and candid hearing. At the very mention of *miracles*, it is probable that they would have dismissed their informer with a smile of contempt, before he could have adduced any evidence in support of his allegations. This would more especially be the treatment which such men as the apostles, and other early preachers of christianity, men in the lower ranks of life, and almost wholly illiterate, would meet with from philosophers, men of letters

letters in general, and all the more distinguished classes.

This state of things will pretty well account for the ignorance of the antient heathens with respect to facts in the Jewish or Christian histories. It will also account for the time that it took for the propagation of christianity, which, considering these circumstances, was very rapid. It is more difficult to account for the similar ignorance of modern unbelievers, who have such abundant means of information perpetually obtruding itself upon them; and yet we meet with examples of as great ignorance at this day, and this in men of letters, men well acquainted with antient languages and history, and of the most respectable abilities.

A dislike to the subject of religion, generated from the causes that have been mentioned in a preceding section, will operate even to the extinction of all liberal curiosity with respect to it. I cannot in any other way account for that extreme ignorance of the Scriptures which is to be found among many well educated persons in England, and other christian countries. The bible is not read in genteel schools, or in families; and though it consists of the most antient of all books, and on other accounts would naturally invite the study of the curious, great numbers of persons, who have even had a liberal education

education, are unable to give any account of their general contents.

The following instance of the extreme ignorance of the Scriptures in a person of whom more knowledge of them might have been expected, may serve both to amuse and to instruct my readers, Being one time in company with Dr. Franklin, and a person now dead, but of considerable genius and a literary turn, brother to an English nobleman now living, being introduced, he turned the conversation upon the subject of the simplicity and beauty of the Oriental style of composition; and to exemplify his observations, he took down his bible and opening it, seemed to read, but really repeated *memoriter*, that chapter which he had himself composed from an old Jewish tradition concerning Abraham. This the gentleman, not doubting but that it was a real chapter in the bible, expressed himself much pleased with. On this the Doctor smiled, and the gentleman perceiving that he had been taken in, was a little mortified. However to try him a little farther, the Doctor took the bible again, and read the first chapter of the book of Job, which the gentleman also expressed himself much pleased with, but said it was no more a part of the bible than the other. The Doctor then shewed him the bible, and said he might read it himself. But even this did not satisfy him.

He

He said it might be a book of his own printing, and no real bible at all.

The Doctor had before observed to me, that one species of profaneness was now extinct, which was ridiculing the Scriptures; because they were no longer read by such persons as were used to take that liberty with them.

He acknowledged to me that he had not given so much attention to the evidences of christianity as the subject required, and desired me to recommend to him a few treatises (but he added of no great length) on the subject; promising to read them with care, and to give me his opinion of them. Accordingly, I named to him that part of *Dr. Hartley's Observations on man*, which treats of the evidence of revelation, and a work of my own, which he said he would read. But the American war breaking out, and he leaving England presently after this, I do not know, whether he ever read them or not. Nor, indeed, do I know that he died an unbeliever.

Can it then be thought extraordinary, that, thus ignorant, and prejudiced as many persons are against religion in general, they should not be believers? They want the necessary elements of christian faith, viz. a knowledge of the facts on which it is founded, or have only such a knowledge as is acquired by hearing them ridiculed. In the
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same situation, they might have been unbelievers in any other history. They might think the Greek and Roman histories to be incredible, and come to smile at them as they do at that of the Jews and of Jesus.

M. Volney, who seems to have read the scriptures, at least in part, gives an account of the history and religion of the Hebrews as romantic as that of Tacitus. According to him, ‘ Moses
‘ was one of those bold and energetic spirits, who
‘ proposed to themselves great objects of ambition. Desirous of separating his nation from
‘ every other, and of founding a distinct empire,
‘ he formed the design of laying the foundation of
‘ it on religious prejudices. But in vain did he
‘ proscribe the worship of symbols, which prevailed in lower Egypt and Phœnicia. His
‘ God was not the less an Egyptian one, the invention of those priests whose disciple he had
‘ been; and *Yaboub*, discovered by his proper
‘ name, the *essence* (of beings) and by his symbol
‘ the *bush of fire*, is no other than the *soul of the*
‘ *world*, the *principle of motion*, which a short
‘ time after Greece adopted under the same denomination of its *You-piter*, the *regenerating*
‘ *being*, and under that of *Ei*, *existence*; which the
‘ Thebans consecrated under the name of *Kneph*,
‘ which Sais adored under the emblem of *Isis*
‘ *veiled*, which Pythagoras honoured under the
‘ name of *Vesta*, and which the Stoic philosophy
‘ defined

‘ defined with precision by calling it the *principle*
‘ *of fire.*’

‘ Moses endeavoured in vain to efface from
‘ his religion every thing that recalled the
‘ worship of the stars. There remained in spite
‘ of him a number of traces of it. And the
‘ seven lights, or planets, of the grand candle-
‘ stick, and the *twelve stones*, or signs in the
‘ urim of the high-priest, the festival of the two
‘ equinoxes, which at this epoch formed each of
‘ them a year, the ceremony of the *lamb*, or
‘ the *celestial ram*, then in his fifth degree, in
‘ fine, the name of *Osiris* itself preserved in his
‘ song, and the *ark*, or coffer, in imitation of the
‘ tomb in which that god was put, remain to
‘ serve as evidences of the relation of these ideas,
‘ and of their derivation from a common source.’

Ruins, p. 263, &c.

M. Volney also expresses his approbation
of the account that Diodorus Siculus gives of
the Jews, who says that ‘ they were driven out
‘ of Egypt in a time of famine, when the country
‘ was overstocked with strangers, and that Mo-
‘ ses, a man of extraordinary wisdom and cou-
‘ rage, took that opportunity of fixing his na-
‘ tion in the mountains of Judea.’ M. Volney
adds, ‘ It would seem paradoxical to reduce the
‘ six hundred thousand armed men, which he led
‘ thither, to six thousand; but I can verify this
‘ paradox

‘ paradox by so many proofs, drawn from the
 ‘ books themselves, that it is necessary to rectify
 ‘ this error of the copies.’ *ib.* p. 378.

On this display of the imagination, for it is nothing else, it is needless to make many remarks. I shall only observe that the name *Osiris* which M. Volney finds in the song of Moses, is from this verse in which he is comparing the God of the Hebrews with those of other nations; saying, Deut. xxxii. 31. *For their rock is not our rock; even our enemies themselves being judges,* in which the Hebrew word rendered *rock* is *tzour*, צור. And it is quite common in the Hebrew scriptures to compare God to a *rock*, and a *fortress*; as a Being able to afford men effectual protection. Surely Moses when he directly opposes the God of his nation to other gods, and evidently had in his eye those of the Egyptians, could not mean to say, to intimate, or give any room to suppose, that they were the same.

In what manner Mr. Volney can prove that the number *six hundred thousand*, is an error of the copy for *six thousand*, does not appear. If it be an error, many other numbers which agree with this, must be errors of the copy also. Besides Mr. Volney will find some difficulty in accounting for so small a number as six thousand men, driven by famine out of Egypt, into
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a wilderness, where they would find it still more difficult to subsist, seizing upon such a country as Palestine, then fully peopled by warlike nations, not less than thirty one in number. It would be more natural, and more consistent in him, to say that the whole of the history is fabulous; that the Israelites never did conquer Palestine, that they never were in Egypt, or that there never was any such nation in the world. This would not be more extraordinary than his maintaining that there never was such a person as Jesus Christ.

This opinion, strange as it must appear to most persons, is avowed by Mr. Volney; though the contrary was never called in question by any antient unbeliever, Jew or heathen, who ever mentioned the subject of christianity. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny, all speak of *Christ* as a real person, and the first of them as having been crucified in the reign of Tiberius. However, Mr. Volney says, (*Ruins*, p. 266,) that
' the Jews returned from the Babylonish cap-
' tivity had borrowed many of their ideas in re-
' ligious from their late masters, the Chaldeans
' and Persians; that their former prophets, see-
' ing the progress made by the Assyrians in their
' conquests of the neighbouring states, easily
' foresaw the approaching fate of their own
' country; and at the same time that they ex-
' pressed their concern for that event, they also
' expressed

‘ expressed their earnest wishes for its restoration,
 ‘ and in their enthusiasm spake of some person
 ‘ who was to accomplish that most desirable event,
 ‘ a *deliverer*, and restorer of the affairs of their
 ‘ nation, and one who would, moreover, make
 ‘ Jerusalem the capital of an empire which
 ‘ should extend over the whole world.’

‘ With these ideas’, Mr. Volney proceeds to
 say, ‘ there concurred others, derived from the
 ‘ sacred books of the Chaldeans and Persians,
 ‘ that there would be a revolution of the world
 ‘ at the end of six thousand years; and that
 ‘ whereas these had been the age, or reign,
 ‘ of *evil*, they would be succeeded by an age or
 ‘ reign of *happiness*. These calculations being
 ‘ admitted by the Jews, they began to reckon
 ‘ near six thousand years from the creation,’
 (which he terms *fiſtitious*) ‘ of the world, and
 ‘ concluded that this happy period was at
 ‘ hand. This expectation exciting a great
 ‘ fermentation in their minds, the coming of
 ‘ this *great mediator*, and *final judge*, was gene-
 ‘ rally expected, and wished for, to put an end
 ‘ to the calamities of which they complained.’
 He then says that, ‘ in consequence of speaking
 ‘ of this personage, some person was said to
 ‘ have seen him, and that this vague rumour
 ‘ soon became a general certainty. The popu-
 ‘ lar report became an averred fact. The imagi-
 ‘ nary personage was realized, and from this

‘phantom, all the circumstances of mythological
‘tradition being brought together, there result-
‘ed an authentic and complete history, of which
‘no person was allowed to doubt.’

A romance more improbable than this, in all its parts, was never, surely, conceived in the mind of man. It is needless to oppose reasoning to such a play of imagination. From reading it one would conclude that the sacred books of the Chaldeans and Persians, of which Mr. Volney speaks, were all extant, and those of the Jews intirely lost; and yet of the former, or any predictions contained in them, we know in a manner nothing; whereas the latter are extant, and may be consulted. And if they be, it will be seen that they contain nothing that, by any fair construction, can be supposed to have been borrowed from the Chaldeans or Persians, the religion of the Jews being the very reverse of theirs in the most fundamental articles.

In the writings of the Hebrew prophets, some of them delivered when the Babylonians were very little known, the captivity of the Jews by that nation, and not by the Assyrians, who had conquered the ten tribes, is distinctly foretold, together with the fall of their empire, and the utter desolation of Babylon, in such a manner as was not fully accomplished till within a few of the last centuries. The exact duration of the Babylonish captivity was foretold by Jeremiah

miah some time before it commenced ; and Daniel, at the beginning of the Babylonian empire, foretold the rise and fall of three others in succession, before the glorious and happy times announced by the preceding prophets. Besides, Moses, while the Israelites were in the wilderness, not only took for granted their settlement in the land of Canaan, but foretold their expulsion out of it, their present dispersed and calamitous state, and their future glorious one. Did *he* learn all this from the sacred books of the Chaldeans and Persians?

But the most extraordinary circumstance in this curious narration is, that this *great deliverer*, who was to rescue the Jews from their state of servitude, and give them the empire of the world, was reported to be come while the Jews remained in subjection to the Romans ; that this persuasion did not lose any ground when the Romans had almost exterminated the nation, and became a certain fact, when the emperor Adrian had so broken and dispersed the people, that not one of them remained in their own country.

Also, without any apparent cause, or magical instrument of transformation, this mighty *conqueror*, the subject of so many prophecies, the great hope of the whole nation of the Jews, is metamorphosed into a *crucified malefactor*, whose followers continued in a state of persecution

tion near three hundred years; and then the history of Jesus and his apostles, though originally no better founded than that of the twelve champions of Christendom, obtained universal credit, and no person was even allowed to call it in question. Compared with this, the conceits of Don Quixote are far within the bounds of probability.

However, as the words *Jesus* and *Christ* occur in books, as the name, or surname, of a person; Mr. Volney, in order to support his opinion of this being nothing more than a fictitious person, derives the term *Christ* from the Hebrew word, '*Heres*, which signifies *the sun*, 'and in Arabic *the guardian*, or *preserver*, the 'proper epithet,' he says, p. 386, 'of *Vichnou*; 'and from this,' he says, 'the Indians imagined 'their god *Chris-en*, or *Christna*.' The word *Jesus* he derives from '*Yes*,' which is formed by 'the union of three letters, the numeral value 'of which is 608, one of the solar periods. The 'same word *Jesus*,' he says, 'is an antient and 'Cabalistic name given to the younger Bacchus, 'the clandestine or nocturnal son of Minerva, 'which, in the whole history of his life, and 'even of his death, retraces the history of the 'god of the christians, that is, of the *star of the* 'day, of which both of them are emblems.' p. 275. Accordingly, Mr. Volney makes christianity to be 'an allegorical worship of the sun, 'under

‘ under the Cabalistic names of *Chrif-en*, or *Christ*, and of *Yes-us*, or *Jesus*.’ p. 266.

Mr. Volney, if we may judge from his numerous quotations of antient writers in all the learned languages, oriental, as well as occidental, must be acquainted with all those languages; for he makes no mention of any translations, and yet, to judge from this specimen of his knowledge of them, he cannot have the smallest tincture of that of the Hebrew, or even of the Greek. For it is well known that *Jesus* is nothing more than the Greek pronunciation of *Joshua*, which is always rendered *Jesus* in the Septuagint; and that *Christ* is the proper translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, which signifies *anointed*, and is derived from *χρῖω*, which signifies *to anoint*.

As it is in vain to use any argumentation on so plain a subject, I shall endeavour to illustrate Mr. Volney’s curious reasoning by putting a similar case. There exists a sect of christians called *Calvinists*. Now a person who was a stranger to them, but knew that the word was derived from the Latin *calvus*, which signifies *bald*, might imagine they were so called from their cutting off their hair. But another person, knowing no more of Latin than Mr. Volney probably does of Greek; but having a smattering of English, might suppose that *Calvin*,

vin, was derived from the word *calf*, and conclude that the Calvinists were so called from their worshipping a calf, in imitation of the antient Egyptians. And there would be just as much of truth or probability in this, as in Mr. Volney's supposition that christianity is an allegorical worship of the sun, and that the words *Jesus* and *Christ*, had the Cabalistic derivation that he gives them.

Dean Swift's ingenious dissertation to prove the antiquity of the English language, in which he derives *Jupiter* from *Jew Peter*, *Archimedes* from *Hark ye maids*, and *Alexander the Great*, from *all eggs under the grate*, is exactly of a piece with these curious etymologies of M. Volney; but with this difference, that the Dean was in jest, whereas Mr. Volney is in serious earnest.

The reducing christianity to an allegory seems to be not uncommon with unbelievers in France. Just before I left England, I had sent to me (I believe with the consent of the author) the plan of a large and very elaborate work, intitled, *A History of all the forms of worship, and of all the religions in the world*, and which I imagine will soon be, if it be not already, published. In this it is said, that 'the author, after
'having discovered the secret of *mysteries* in
'general, at length takes off the veil which has
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‘ so long covered those of the christians. He
 ‘ finds the origin of their sacred fictions in the
 ‘ theology of the magi, which the Jews have
 ‘ copied often word for word; and that of the
 ‘ *lamb*, the *restorer*, in the mysteries of their
 ‘ *Mythra*, dead and risen again, like Christ, and
 ‘ whose birth was celebrated the 25th of De-
 ‘ cember at midnight, at the rising of the con-
 ‘ stellation of the *celestial virgin*; which in the
 ‘ antient spheres of Persia was represented giv-
 ‘ ing suck to an infant, called *Christ* and *Jesus*.’

‘ In the second part of his work, the author
 ‘ brings this fiction nearer to that of the Phœ-
 ‘ nicians, who worshipped the sun under the
 ‘ name of *Adonis*, of that of the famous *Osiris*,
 ‘ of that of *Bacchus*, of that of *Atys* of the Phry-
 ‘ gians, all fables, the heroes of which die and
 ‘ rise again, and which have no other object
 ‘ than that of *god the sun*, that is to say, the
 ‘ same divinity which the sect of christians adore
 ‘ under the name of *Christ*. In one word, the
 ‘ the author demonstrates that the god of the
 ‘ christians is that of the Inca’s of Peru; and
 ‘ that there is no difference between them, ex-
 ‘ cept that the latter knew what God they wor-
 ‘ shipped, and the former’ (the christians) ‘ are
 ‘ still ignorant of it ; though the gospel of John
 ‘ informs them of it every day, when he says
 ‘ that Christ is *that light which lighteth every man*
 ‘ *that cometh into the world*.’

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I shall be glad to see this curious work,* which I am told is very voluminous; not doubting but it will afford as much amusement as Mr. Volney's *Ruins*. But surely such productions as these do not mark the *age of reason*. I have seen a pamphlet in French, in which the word *Christians*, in that language *Chretiens*, was derived from *Cretans*, the author supposing them to have been originally of that island, and thence to have had their name.

Before such crude notions as these can be admitted, unbelievers must do what Mr. Volney, with as much of truth as any thing in the preceding quotation from him, says of believers. 'The first article of all belief, the first dogma of all religion, is an absolute proscription of doubt, the prohibition of examination, and the renouncing of one's own judgment,' *Ruins* p. 115. Surely he could never have read the New Testament, in which we find, 1 Peter iii. 15, *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, that is, in a modest and respectful manner.* 1. Thess. v. 21, *Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.*

* Since this was written I have seen this work advertised, as printed at Paris in 12 vols. 8vo. with the name of the author, DUPUIS, and an Atlas.

It is such a system as that of Mr. Volney, so little able to bear examination, that requires the aid of implicit faith. For in no work whatever have I met with so many arbitrary and manifestly ill founded assertions.

Such, in particular, is what he says concerning *priests*, p. 291. ‘The spirit of priests,’ he says, ‘their system of conduct, their actions, and their morals, are absolutely the same. They every where consist of private societies, corporations that are the enemies of the rest of the community. They every where attribute to themselves prerogatives and immunities, by means of which they ease themselves of the burdens of the other classes. They every where live in celibacy, to get rid even of domestic embarrassments. Every where, under the cloke of poverty, they find the secret of being rich, and of procuring all sorts of enjoyments. Under the pretence of poverty, they receive greater revenues than those of princes. Under the pretence of devotion, they live in idleness and licentiousness,’ &c. &c. &c.

This is but a part of Mr. Volney’s character of all priests. But indiscriminate invectives on whole classes of men are never just. Certainly this character does not apply to Jesus, the apostles, or the preachers of christianity for three hundred years, except in some small degree to the bishops in the greater sees. Mr.
Volney,

Volney, however, will say that there never were such men. But he has read the history of France, and can he say that it applies to the Protestant clergy in that country? Did it apply to them at the revocation of the edict at Nantes? How many of them perished in dungeons, in the galleys, and by distresses of every kind, seeking a precarious subsistence in foreign countries, when by conforming to the orders of the king they might have lived at their ease. In fact, this character has never applied to the christian clergy, except to the bishops in the greater sees, and some of the monks; and to them with many exceptions, and much abatement. The established clergy in England, as a body, are but slenderly provided for, those in Scotland still worse, and they do not profess celibacy. To the Dissenting ministers in that country, to say nothing of the persecutions they have suffered, it applies still less. Of this I am some judge, having been one of them more than forty years, and I can say without fear of being contradicted, that in the most favourable situations the profession never yielded me half a maintenance, and yet in this respect my success greatly exceeded my original expectations. And what does it do for me here, except perhaps expose me to the contempt of such men as Mr. Volney, which, however, I feel myself pretty well able to bear.

SECTION

SECTION. IX.

Of the Tendency to Atheism in modern Unbelievers.

THE progress of infidelity in the present age is attended with a circumstance which did not so frequently accompany it in any former period, at least in England, which is, that unbelievers in revelation generally proceed to the disbelief of the being and providence of God, so as to become properly *Atheists*. However, when the subject is duly considered, it will be found that the same disposition and turn of mind which leads to deism will naturally in the present state of knowledge lead to atheism.

Whatever exceptions there may be to the observation, it is for the most part true, that a *wish* to reject revelation precedes the actual rejection of it. The belief of it is felt as a *restraint*, which many persons are desirous of throwing off; and this is more effectually done on the atheistical than on the deistical system. I must be allowed to take it for granted, because I am confident that, with few exceptions (and I should rejoice if I could think they were more) it is a fact, that it is the too strict morals of the scriptures that displeases the generality of
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unbelievers. The rule of life prescribed in those books is more definite, and less easily evaded, than that which is perceived by the mere light of nature, which is too easily made to bend to men's inclinations; so that they who profess to follow *that* only find no great difficulty in justifying to themselves any indulgence to which they are much inclined, and which christians of every denomination condemn. And for the same reason that an unbeliever viciously inclined prefers natural to revealed religion, he will prefer no religion at all, or pure atheism, which rejects every idea of a future state, to deism which admits of it.

While the rewards of virtue and the punishments of vice are supposed to take place in this life only, and are seen to be what they really are, very various and uncertain, a regard to them will not be sufficient to controul strong natural inclinations. We see every day that though habitual intemperance occasions diseases and premature death, thousands, who yet are as far from courting disease or death as other persons, persist in sensual indulgence; thinking at the time that, in each particular transgression of the rules of temperance, there is little, if any thing, criminal, that it is a thing which affects themselves only; and flattering themselves that the consequences will either not take place with respect to *them*, or will be inconsiderable,

able, so as to be overbalanced by the present enjoyment. Now were all consideration of religion removed, men would have no more restraint with respect to any practice whatever, to which they were naturally inclined, than they usually have with respect to excess in eating and drinking. They would have no dread of future punishment, and would flatter themselves with the hope of escaping any temporal inconvenience.

While the belief of the being of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, were articles of faith with those who rejected revelation (which was the case with all the celebrated unbelievers in England in the last and the beginning of the present century) there was a considerable restraint upon men's conduct. It is true that the rule of moral duty is less accurately defined on the principles of the mere light of nature, than on those of revelation, and therefore unbelievers could without self-reproach take greater liberties in their conduct than christians; but still there would remain a suspicion, that the supreme Being who would hereafter call them to account for their conduct, might judge differently from what they did; and as they would not be able at all times to secure the approbation of their own minds, in their reflections on their conduct, so fully as they could wish to do it, they might dread the
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more impartial judgment of God. But this apprehension and restraint, to whatever it might amount, would be wholly removed on the supposition of there being no God, no providence, or future state. A vicious unbeliever in revelation would therefore naturally not be displeased on finding the evidence for this belief weaker than he had thought it to be, and rejoice when he could think it to be of no weight at all. And this shews the natural tendency of deism to atheism. If a man be an unbeliever in a future state, it is of little or no consequence with respect to his conduct, whether he believe in the being of a God or not; because on that supposition this belief would add nothing to the sanctions of virtue.

Or, supposing the disposition, or bias, that leads a man to infidelity be not a propensity to any kind of vicious indulgence, but only a wish to be considered as a person free from vulgar prejudices, and one who thinks for himself, he will be farther removed from the vulgar by rejecting the belief of a God, a providence, and a future state, than by the rejection of revelation only. If he have any thing of this disposition, which is felt in a greater or less degree by most persons of liberal education, or who have much intercourse with the fashionable world, he will feel more pride and self complacence in proportion as he recedes farther from the ideas and sentiments

ments of those whose education has been more confined, and who have seen less of the world than he has done.

Lastly, this progress from deism to atheism, must have been greatly favoured by the prevalence of true philosophy, which has led the more intelligent christians to reject the doctrine of a *soul*, as distinct from the body, and capable of action and enjoyment when separated from it, and to adopt the opinion that, naturally, man is wholly mortal; which is in truth the doctrine of the Scriptures. While it was the universal opinion that the soul of man is naturally immaterial, and of course, immortal, the idea of its surviving the death of the body, and of its existing in some different state, and therefore probably a state of retribution, was unavoidable. Also, the belief of the existence of such a number of spiritual and intelligent beings, was naturally connected with the belief of other immaterial and superior spiritual beings, and also of one *great spirit* presiding over them all, and the author of all; so that the belief of a soul naturally drew after it that of a God, and of a future state.

But of late it is become almost the universal belief of philosophers, christians as well as others, that the faculties of perception and thought depend upon a certain organization of the body, and especially of the brain; that when

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this organization is disordered, all the mental operations are impeded, and consequently that when the corporeal organization is wholly destroyed, there is an end of all sensation and mental action; and therefore that there is no possibility of the restoration of them but in a resurrection of the dead at some future period; and the evidence of this depends altogether on that of revelation. When, therefore, this is disbelieved, all belief in a God and a future state, will of course vanish with it.

On both these accounts we may cease to wonder that, whereas the generality of unbelievers were formerly merely deists, they are now generally atheists. This I know to be the case very generally in England; but I found it to be much more, I may say universally, so in France, when I was there in 1774; when, in consequence of avowing myself to be a christian, I heard much conversation on the subject.

This I find confirmed by the author of a *Letter to a sensible Woman*, which I quoted in the *Preface to my Discourses delivered in Philadelphia*, who says, p. 25, ‘ Theism is an opinion respectable for the genius and the virtues of men who have embraced it,’ (referring in a note to Socrates and Rousseau) ‘ no less than for the advantage which this first step towards reason, on abandoning the prejudices of infancy, has been of to mankind. But after all, it is only
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‘ a first step ; and no persons would stop there,
‘ if they would frankly give way to the impulse
‘ they have received. No person remains in
‘ this intermediate system but through want
‘ of reflection, timidity, passion, or obstinacy.
‘ Time, experience, and an impartial examina-
‘ tion of our ideas, will undeceive us. Voltaire,
‘ who was long the apostle of theism, professed
‘ to doubt towards the close of his life, and re-
‘ pented that he had been too confident. Many
‘ others have experienced the same.’

It must also be acknowledged that the evidences of natural religion are more difficult to understand, requiring more of what is usually called *metaphysical reasoning*, than those of revealed religion. These, relating wholly to the truth of *historical facts*, require only such proofs and reasoning as men are every day accustomed to attend to, and consequently are the best judges of. But such reasoning as must be used to prove the being and attributes of God, to say nothing of a future state, from the light of nature, is of a very different kind, and much less easy to comprehend.

Indeed, there is one difficulty which, from the nature of the subject, must ever be insurmountable to us. We say that every effect must have a cause, every machine a maker, and that where there are evident marks of design and contrivance, an *end* to be gained, and *means*

adapted to it, there must be a *mind*, in which ideas of the fitness of these to one another were formed. We say that this world, and all its parts, the human body, and all our senses, &c. &c. furnish innumerable instances of this, and of the most evident kind; the eye, for example, being formed for seeing, the ear for hearing, the hands for handling, &c. and that many of these parts conspire to the same end; whence we deduce the well grounded opinion of the necessity of a maker, a being possessed of power and wisdom equal to the execution of such a piece of workmanship. But because we cannot give any account of the origin of this Being, the atheist says we may as well rest where we are, and content ourselves with saying, that the world had no maker, as that the author of it had none. Whereas they say that it is easy to account for the popular belief of a God from the circumstances in which men have been placed.

Mr. Volney, treating of the origin of the idea of a God, says, *Ruins*, p. 213, that ‘ it
‘ first arose from men being sensible that they
‘ were subject to various powers and influences
‘ which they could not controul, residing in the
‘ several parts of nature, to which, judging by
‘ a comparison of the exertion of the powers of
‘ which they were themselves possessed, they
‘ ascribed intelligence and volition. In this
‘ manner, the visible universe was soon filled
‘ with

‘ with gods of different dispositions, some bene-
‘ volent, and others malevolent with respect to
‘ man. Thus,’ he says, p. 216, ‘ religion,
‘ which was an arbitrary idea, without any in-
‘ fluence on the relations of men to one another,
‘ was only a vain homage rendered to the visible
‘ powers of nature, among which the sun, the
‘ moon, and the stars, were the most conspicu-
‘ ous.’

‘ After this,’ he says, ‘ men proceeded to wor-
‘ ship the symbols of these powers, and pursuing
‘ the same idea, they supposed the whole world
‘ to be animated, by a principle similar to that
‘ which animates man and other animals, which
‘ they made to be the element of fire, the vital
‘ principle of the whole universe. And last
‘ of all, they got the idea of the world being
‘ a *machine*, and therefore of its requiring a
‘ *maker* distinct from it. At this epocha,’ he
‘ says, p. 258, ‘ superficial minds, losing the
‘ thread of the ideas which had directed the
‘ former profound researches, or ignorant of the
‘ facts which served for their foundation, over-
‘ turned all their conclusions by the introduc-
‘ tion of a new and strange chimera. They pre-
‘ tended that this universe, these heavens, these
‘ stars, this sun, was only a machine of the or-
‘ dinary kind. And on this hypothesis applying
‘ a comparison drawn from the works of art, they
‘ raised an edifice of the most chimerical so-
‘ phisms.

‘phisms. A machine, they say, cannot make
‘itself. It had a pre-existent artificer. It
‘points him out by its own existence. The
‘world is a machine, and therefore there exists
‘a maker of it. In vain did the antient philo-
‘sophers object, that the artificer himself had
‘need of relations, and of an author; and they
‘had only to add one step more to the ladder;
‘by taking eternity from the world, and giving
‘it to him.’

‘The innovators’, he says, p. 209, ‘not
‘content with this first paradox, passed to a
‘second, and applied to their artificer the
‘theory of the human understanding. They
‘pretended that the artificer had made his ma-
‘chine upon a *plan*, or *ideas*, existing in his
‘own mind’. Thus’ he adds, p. 260, ‘the
‘divinity was become at last a chimerical and
‘abstract Being, a scholastic subtlety, a sub-
‘stance without form, a body without figure,
‘a true delirium of the mind, of which reason
‘cannot comprehend any thing at all.’

We acknowledge that both the deity himself
and the manner of his existence are incompre-
hensible by us; but nevertheless we say that the
eye must have had a maker as well as the *teles-*
cope, which is an instrument of a similar na-
ture, extending the power of sight, whatever
difficulty we may find with respect to the ma-
ker of the eye. We may not be able to go
any

any farther, but so far we *cannot help* going. From the nature of the subject, however, the atheist may argue too plausibly for the deist to be able to return a ready and perfectly satisfactory answer.

As to the evidence of a future state from the light of nature, modern unbelievers make very light of it indeed. ‘Man,’ says Mr. Volney, p. 245, ‘curious about every thing of which he is ignorant, and fond of a long existence, had inquired concerning what would become of him after his death, because he had very early reasoned upon the principle of *life*, which animates his body, and which leaves it without figuring it. And because he had got an idea of attenuated substances, phantoms and shadows, he was fond of believing that he should continue in a world under ground, that life which he was too unwilling to part with; and the infernal regions were a commodious situation to receive the dear object which he could not renounce.’ He then, in the person of an imaginary speaker, whom he makes to be the *Lama*, says, p. 245, ‘Behold Persians, your invisible and imaginary world. Behold the origin of your abodes of pleasure and pain of which you have formed your *world restored to its youth*, your city of resurrection, placed under the equator. Behold, O Jews and Christians, the disciples of the Persians, whence are come
‘ your

‘ your Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, your paradise, your heavens,’ &c.

We readily acknowledge that the heathens might originally come at their ideas of a future state in some such manner as Mr. Volney here describes; and this may have been the origin of the philosophical doctrine of a *soul*. But revelation supplies us with a very different and better foundation for it; and more agreeable to the principles of true philosophy. Nothing is said in the scriptures of an immaterial soul distinct from the body, or of its happiness or misery in an intermediate state; but of the whole man rising to life at a future period. This is announced to us by a messenger sent from God, who worked the most evident miracles as a proof of his mission, especially raising several persons from a state of death to life, and exposing himself to be put to death in the most public and indisputable manner, and rising again at a fixed time. And it is not possible to require evidence more satisfactory than this.

There are some traces of the doctrine of a resurrection having been known to the heathens in the more early ages; and if so, it must have been derived from the tradition of some revelation made to their ancestors, perhaps the first parents of the human race. The custom of burying utensils, and also that of killing men
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and animals at the tombs of persons, which was in use in several antient nations, and is used by some at this day, could only have arisen from an idea that the same things that were useful to men in this world would be equally useful to them in another. It must, therefore, in their ideas, be such a life as the present, and not that of an unembodied spirit. ‘Some of the Arabs,’ Mr. Sale says, *Introduction to the Koran*, p. 27, ‘believed in a resurrection; and among them were those, who when they died had their camel tied by their sepulchre, and so left without meat or drink, to perish, and accompany them to the other world, lest they should be obliged at the resurrection to go on foot, which was reckoned very scandalous.’ Mahomet himself retained so much of this doctrine, that in his Koran he never supposed the virtuous to be rewarded, or the vicious punished, before the general resurrection.

Mr Volney’s account of the primitive condition of man, without any known author or guide, is not a little curious. He says, p. 211, ‘it is a sufficient answer to all systems which suppose the interposition of a God, in the origin of the world, that man receives all his ideas by means of his senses; that at his origin (p. 24,) ‘man was formed naked, with respect to body and mind, thrown by accident upon the earth, confused and savage, an orphan abandoned

‘ done by the unknown power which produced
‘ him. He found no being descended from the
‘ heavens to inform him of his wants, which
‘ he learns only from his senses, or of his duties,
‘ which arise only from his wants. Like other
‘ animals, without experience of the past, or
‘ foresight of the future, he wandered in the
‘ midst of the forest, guided and governed by
‘ the affections of his nature. By the pain of
‘ hunger he was led to his food, and to provide
‘ for his sustenance; by the intemperature of
‘ the air he wished to cover his body, and he
‘ made himself clothes. By the attraction of
‘ pleasure he approached a being like himself;
‘ and perpetuated his species.’ &c.

Mr. Volney did not, surely, consider that the first man, let him have had a maker, or no maker; let him have dropped from the clouds, or have risen out of the earth, let him have been produced in a state of infancy, or of manhood; yet that, without instruction, he must have perished before he could, by his own sensations and experience, have acquired knowledge enough to preserve his life. The pain of hunger would have come upon him long before he could have learned to walk, or have got the use of any of his limbs; and the more full grown he was at the time of his production, the more difficult would his learning to walk, or even to crawl, have been. Man, therefore, must have had

had a *guide* as well as a *maker*; and divine interposition was absolutely necessary at his entrance into life. Mr. Volney's idea was evidently that of a Robinson Crusoe, thrown upon an uninhabited island, with all the knowledge that he had acquired in the course of his former life. His primitive man must have been produced with the instinctive knowledge of a gardener at least. He must have been able to distinguish fruits that were wholesome from those that were noxious, and have got, by some means or other, the use of his limbs, his eyes, and other senses, before it would have been in his power to avail himself of that knowledge.

Let Mr. Volney consider what he himself, with his present strength of muscles, and acuteness of intellect, could possibly have done in the situation of his primitive man. Let him have been left on the earth in ever so favourable a climate, and in ever so warm and comfortable a place, so as to want no clothing, yet, having no ideas but such as he got by the impression of the objects around him, he would have been no better than a great sprawling infant. By the stimulus of light he would have opened and shut his eyes, but he would have had no idea of the relative distances of any objects. The nearest tree, the remotest hill, and even the heavenly bodies would have seemed to be in the same plane and all contiguous to him. He might have moved
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his arms and legs in an automatic manner, but he would not have been able to rise from the ground. He would have felt the pain of hunger; but though the most proper food should have happened to be ever so near to him, he could not have known, without experience, that eating would remove that pain. He would therefore have lain a helpless prey to the first wild beast, if there were any, that should have happened to find him. If it should have happened that a female, of the same size had been produced at the same time, and have been dropped by another accident (the chance of which must have been very small indeed) ever so near him; being equally ignorant, they would have been equally helpless, and must have soon perished together, without any perpetuation of the species. All would have been to begin again, and to no better purpose.

If Mr Volney will give himself time to think a little more closely on this important subject he will find that divine interpositions must have been necessary at least at the formation of man, or that his formation would have been in vain; and if they were necessary then, they may have been expedient since that time. Moses's account of the primitive state of man, though not without its difficulties, is certainly much more probable than that of Mr Volney. Indeed,

deed, no hypothesis can well be more improbable than his.

Some will say that as deism leads to atheism, Socinianism leads to deism; and it cannot be denied that there are many instances of this transition, nor is it at all extraordinary that this should be the case. Many christians from being Calvinists became Arminians, from Arminians Arians, and from Arians Socinians, from a disposition to throw off the yoke of authority, and to shew that they have divested themselves of the prejudices of education; or from a love of truth, and a spirit of inquiry, not accompanied with an equal love of virtue, or a serious attention to a future state. And if these states of mind have had much influence in these changes of sentiment, they will naturally tend to lead them farther, even to deism and atheism.

But where freedom of thinking is joined to real piety, and a sense of the value of revelation, as that which alone can give us any assurance of a future state, the difference between Socinianism and deism (which is now seen to be intimately connected with atheism) will appear to be infinitely greater, and of a much more serious nature, than any of the differences of opinion preceding it, and therefore will not be so lightly passed. The difference between the belief of a future state, which is common to all the various denominations of christians,
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and the total rejection of it, which necessarily follows the disbelief of revelation, is such as must affect a thinking and serious mind unspeakably more than any other difference of opinion whatever. The feeling of this, joined to the greater clearness of the evidences of revelation, will prevent any truly serious persons from passing that boundary. This opinion will appear harsh and uncharitable in some particular cases; but it agrees with my own observation as far as it goes, so that I can say, as before, with Dr. Hartley, that 'infidelity is never found 'to consist with an exalted piety and devotion 'to God.'

As to Voltaire, D'Alembert, Mr Volney, and almost all the modern unbelievers whose writings I have perused (and there are none of any note that I have not read with the best attention that I can give to them) they appear to me to bear such evident marks of prejudice, a disposition to cavil, an indifference, to say the least, to several essential articles of sound morality, and a contempt of devotion, though the noblest attainment of man, and so little desire of that greatest of all objects, a future life, that I cannot help considering their opinions on any subject relating to religion, and especially revelation, as of little value, how highly soever I may think, (and I am disposed to think very highly) of their abilities in other respects.

SECTION.

SECTION X.

General Observations on the Prevalence of Infidelity.

ARDENTLY as the zealous christian must wish for the extension of his religion, and the universal prevalence of those principles which he conceives to enlighten his own mind, to cheer his heart under all the vicissitudes of life, and to give him hope even in death ; and much as he will, consequently, lament the prevalence of principles which have an opposite tendency, yet, upon a more extensive view of the subject, he will see no reason to be disturbed, or alarmed, at the present aspect of things.

The prevalence of infidelity, great as it certainly is, can never be universal. Admitting revealed religion to be ever so ill founded, no better, for example, than the heathenism of the Greeks and Romans, yet being the faith of the bulk of the *common people* in all countries called christian, and they having a strong attachment to it, it may be taken for granted that they will long continue to believe it; since it is universally true that the common people, who receive their opinions and practices from their ancestors, and are little disposed to speculate, are very backward to change them, and retain them a long time

time after the more thinking and inquisitive abandon them. This we see to be the case even when the new religion has something the most inviting to offer in the place of the system that is to be given up. Heathenism continued in many villages of the Roman empire six hundred years after the promulgation of christianity. But as modern unbelievers do not pretend to have any thing to propose as an equivalent to what the christian must abandon, it may be expected to continue much longer in the world, and independently of any rational evidence in its favour.

But the rational christian having no doubt of the truth of his religion, is confident that it will finally prevail, and by its own evidence, when it comes to be attended to, bear down all opposition. It will be sufficient to all impartial persons, even those who have not the leisure, or the means, of entering into the historical investigation themselves, that the truly intelligent, the inquisitive, the candid, and the virtuous, will be the friends of revelation; and that the firm belief of it tends to form a character superior to that of unbelievers, inspiring a dignity and elevation of mind incompatible with any thing mean or base.

The true christian, having a constant respect to God, a providence, and a future state, feels himself less interested in the things that excite the

the avarice, the ambition, and other base passions of men; and consequently his mind, elevated by devotion, more easily expands itself into universal benevolence, and all the heroic virtues that are connected with it. The christian, believing that every thing under the government of God will have a glorious termination, in universal virtue and universal happiness, easily yields himself the willing instrument in the hands of providence, for so great a purpose; and considering himself as, with the apostle, (2. Cor. vi. 1.) *a worker together with God*, he will live a life of habitual devotion, and benevolence; sentiments which are inconsistent with a propensity to sensual and irregular indulgence.

On the other hand, the generality of unbelievers will appear to be persons to whom the subject of religion is, on some account or other, unpleasant, and who evidently give but little attention to it, or to its evidences, and therefore, cannot be deemed competent judges of them, whatever be their ability, or knowledge, in other respects. A great proportion of them, it cannot be denied, are also profligate, and licentious in their manners; and seldom or never looking to God, or a providence, they must have their views greatly contracted, and of course shew other symptoms of a little and narrow mind.

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If any person will say that the principles of christianity tend not to elevate, but to debase, the human character, I cannot help, from my own very different views of things, concluding his mind is under some very improper influence, such as prevents his forming a true judgment in one of the clearest of cases. If he be capable of understanding *Hartley's Theory of the mind*, he may see what I have advanced on this subject demonstrated, as far as any thing relating to the affections of the mind is capable of demonstration. He may see the pleasures of *sensation*, *imagination*, *ambition*, *self-interest*, *sympathy*, *theopathy*, and the *moral sense*, rise in due gradation, and the three last mentioned to coalesce, and absorb the former, as the human character advances in excellence; the consequence of which is a capacity for higher and more durable gratifications with respect to a man's self, and superior qualifications, and dispositions, for communicating happiness to others.

Also, the great views opened to us in revelation, and in revelation only, are necessary, as I have shewn in my *Discourses on the evidences of revealed religion*, to enlarge the comprehension of the human mind, and thereby to give us the same kind of superiority over other men, that men in general have over brutes. Unbelievers in revelation and a future state will have little inducement to think of God, or of a providence;

dence ; and consequently, with very few exceptions, they become not only practical, but speculative atheists. It is impossible, therefore, that they should attain that state of *habitual devotion*, or that constant regard to God, that lively sense of his intimate presence with them, and government over them, which is necessary to great excellence of character, and which has an intimate connection with the most disinterested and active benevolence*.

I am far, however, from being unwilling to acknowledge, that there are many persons, of whose understandings I have the highest opinion, but whose objects of attention have been wholly different from mine, who will be so far from concurring with me in this opinion, of the superiority of the christian character, that they will treat it with contempt ; and unless all their habits of living and thinking, which go together, could be reversed, there is no prospect of leading them to entertain different ideas. In this case there is no remedy. We must continue to differ. They will make light of my opinion on the subject, and I shall consider them with compassion ; hoping, however, that in a future period of their existence, even *they* will come to feel and think as I do, and that we shall all see reason to rejoice in reflecting on the wonder-

* See my two Discourses on *habitual devotion*, and the duty of *not living to ourselves*.

ful, but eventually successful, methods by which such a glorious catastrophe will have been brought about.

Considering the many disadvantages under which the defence of christianity now labours, especially from a prevailing aversion to the subject, and a consequent indisposition to give that attention to its evidences which the importance of it requires; seeing so many excellent defences of it pass unheeded, or without any considerable effect, except confirming the faith of those who are already christians; I say, judging from this aspect of things, I am inclined to think that the final triumph which is destined for the christian religion, and which is the subject of so many prophecies, will not be left to be accomplished by the slow process of argumentation (which however, would, no doubt, produce the same effect in a sufficient length of time) but by another age of miracles, more illustrious than any that have yet been displayed, and which is also the subject of several prophecies, especially that of Joel, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost, which I do not think has yet had its proper accomplishment. Ch. ii. 28. *It shall come to pass in the last day, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, &c.* and that this glorious time will be preceded by the personal appearance of Christ descending in the clouds of heaven, and coming to exercise his proper kingdom.

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This second coming of Christ, and the commencement of the Millenium, we are led by a whole series of prophecies to expect immediately after the overthrow of the present European monarchies, which are evidently tottering to their base. Judging also by what we see, there is no prospect of the general conversion of the Jews but in such a manner as the apostle Paul was converted, that is, by the personal appearance of Christ himself; when, and not before, they will say, (Matt. xxiii, 39.) *blest is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

According to the same spirit of prophecy the destruction of popery, or Paul's *man of sin*, is not to be effected but by the appearance of Christ himself, and this event may not be very distant. In short, all things seem to be approaching in an extraordinary manner, but by the operation of natural causes, to the very state that was foretold so many ages ago, as to precede those glorious and happy times, when the *whole earth*, (Is. 11. 9.) *will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord*, when there will be, though in fact here below, 2 Pet. 3. 10, *a new heavens and a new earth in which will dwell righteousness.*

In the mean time, christianity will serve to discriminate the characters of men. It will be chearfully embraced by the worthiest and the best of men, and it will be the means of making them worthier and better, while it will be
rejected

rejected by the unworthy ; and this rejection, accompanied with a less restrained indulgence of their appetites, and their giving with more eagerness into a variety of wordly pursuits, will tend to debase their characters still more. And, from the knowledge that I have of men, it is evident to me that this is the case in fact.

That christianity should have this two fold effect, is not extraordinary. It is necessarily the case, in the wise plan of Providence, with every other means of virtuous improvement. Neither prosperity nor adversity are ever sent in vain, never leaving any man as they found him, but always making him either better, or worse. Prosperity may either make a man more grateful to God, and more benevolent to man ; or it may make him proud, insolent, and unfeeling ; and adversity may either make him humble and resigned, or fretful, peevish, and malevolent.

The intelligent christian will likewise see a valuable purpose answered by the present prevalence of infidelity. It is a striking fulfilment of the prophecies of our Saviour, who, though he foretold that his church should never fail, likewise intimated, (Luke. viii. 18) that, at his second coming, he should not find much *faith* (or a general belief and expectation of his coming) *in the earth*. It is likewise a confirmation of what the apostles have written concerning *the apostacy*

apostacy of the latter days. In the mean time the prevalence of infidelity is the most efficacious means of purifying our religion from the abuses and corruptions which at present debase it; and especially of overturning the civil establishments of christianity in all christian countries, whereby the kingdom of Christ has been made a kingdom of this world, having been made subservient to the corrupt policy of men, and in every respect the reverse of what it originally was.

Thus are unbelievers employed by divine providence to reform the christian church, and they will do it far more effectually than any of its friends would have done; and this will pave the way for its universal prevalence hereafter.

Thus the corruptions and abuses of christianity produce infidelity, and this infidelity is the means, in the wise order of providence, of the complete cure of those corruptions and abuses, with only a temporary and partial injury to that religion, of which they are so great an incumbrance.

SECTION. XI.

*Advice to rational Christians respecting the present
Prevalence of Infidelity.*

AS I intend this publication chiefly for the use of *Christians*, and the circumstances in which we find ourselves are in a great measure new, and peculiarly interesting, I shall close the work with some advice with respect to our conduct in them, and I shall comprise the whole under four heads.

1. In this state of the open rejection of christianity by so many persons of the most conspicuous characters, it is the peculiar duty of every christian to make the most open profession of his religion, without being moved by the apostacy of ever so great a number, or the obloquy, or ridicule, to which he may be exposed on that account; remembering the awful denunciation of our Saviour, Math. viii. 28, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him also will the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his father, with the holy angels.*

In order to make this open profession of christianity to the most advantage, it is necessary that christians should assemble for the purpose of *public worship*, though in the smallest numbers; letting

letting it be known that there is such worship, and that others may attend if they please. A christian who is not known to be such except by the general uprightness of his conduct, will, no doubt, be respected, but not as a christian. It will not be known on what *principles* he acts, and therefore others will be but little wiser or better by his means. But a christian church, a number of persons regularly meeting as such, to encourage and edify one another, reading the scriptures, and administering christian ordinances, is, as our Saviour said, *a city set on an hill, which cannot be hid; and when our light thus shines before men, others will not only see our good works, but also the principles from which they proceed, and thus be led to glorify our father who is in heaven.* For the same reason, when a spurious and corrupt christianity is most prevalent, the more intelligent christians should separate themselves, and form other societies for public worship, that unbelievers may have an opportunity of judging between them, and not be led to take it for granted that there is no christianity but such as they perhaps justly reject.

2. Every christian should, as far as possible, make himself master of the arguments in favour of his religion, that they may appear not to be governed by a principle of implicit faith, but, as the apostle Peter says (1 Pet. iii. 15.) *be ready*

ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him. And the main argument for the truth of christianity (but from the discussion of which all unbelievers have hitherto shrunk) is very plain and intelligible. It is the certain belief of the great facts on which it is founded, by those who must have known the truth of the case, and who were most nearly interested to ascertain it. If, on such undeniable evidence, it be true that Christ wrought real miracles, that he died, and rose from the dead, the christian religion is true; and we may depend upon it that, according to his repeated declaration, he will come again, to raise all the dead, to judge the world, and to give to every man according to his works (which is all that is of most consequence in christianity) whatever unbelievers may find to object to the system in other respects.

But though it be desirable that all christians should be well grounded in the principles of their religion, and be able to give a satisfactory *reason of the hope that is in them*, this is not necessary to its effect on their hearts and lives. For this purpose a firm *faith*, however acquired, or on whatever principles supported, is sufficient. If any man really believe in the being and providence of God here, and in a future state of rewards and punishments hereafter, he will
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regulate his life according to it; and with respect to *himself* nothing more could be done, if he understood the true grounds of his faith ever so well. Every person, therefore, who is himself a firm believer in these principles, and sensible of their importance, will endeavour to instil them into the minds of his children and dependents as effectually as he can, even before they are capable of understanding the grounds of them. On this principle men always act in other respects. A man may be a good practical arithmetician, or a surveyor, without understanding the reasons of the rules by which he operates. He will make no mistake in the application of the *rule of three*, or that of the *extraction of roots* though he should not know the reasons why he multiplies and divides as he is directed to do. And he may survey land with great accuracy, without understanding the principles of trigonometry, from which the rules of his practice are deduced.

3. But we should most carefully bear in mind, that in the defence of christianity, as in our whole conduct, we should show a disposition worthy of it. Besides that uniform superiority of mind to this world, which removes us to the greatest distance from every thing mean and base; besides that spirit of habitual devotion, and universal benevolence, which raises the human character to the highest pitch of
moral

moral excellence (of the most important elements of which unbelievers, who have not the enlarged views that christianity opens to us, are necessarily destitute) let our behaviour towards unbelievers themselves be the reverse of what theirs generally is towards christians, and which is so conspicuous in the writings of Voltaire and others. Let there be nothing in it of their sarcastic turn of mind, which implies both contempt and malevolence. Let it be with that *meekness* and *benevolence*, which the apostles so strongly recommended, 1 Pet. iii, 15. Tim. ii, 20. Let every thing we say on the subject, or do with respect to it, discover the greatest good will, and friendly concern for those who differ from us, though in a matter of so much consequence. Let us consider them as persons who are unhappily misled by false views of things, and whom, if they be of a candid disposition, a juster view will set right, but whom an angry or contemptuous opposition would irritate, and alienate more than ever.

Let us regard christianity itself as only a means of virtue, and moral improvement, and therefore let us not be much concerned if infidelity do not (as however it is too apt to do) lead men into vice. Unbelievers may be men of decent and valuable characters, though destitute of the more sublime virtues which give the greatest dignity to human nature, and fit them
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in a more eminent manner for the peculiar employment, and the peculiar happiness, of a future state. Let us also indulge the pleasing hope that hereafter, though not at present, their minds, if not essentially depraved, wanting only that farther *light* which will irresistibly burst upon them hereafter, they will be every thing that we can wish for them, and therefore that though we differ at present, we shall some time hence rejoice together. We are all brethren, children of the same father; and though differing ever so much in other respects, should regard and love one another as such. Besides, how can we show our superiority, or greater comprehension of mind, arising from a habit of attending to great and distant objects, and looking beyond ourselves, but by greater meekness, forbearance, candour, and benevolence towards men, as well as by greater resignation, and habitual devotion with respect to God, and a greater command over our appetites and passions in general.

We should ever bear in mind that superior knowledge implies superior obligations. As to believe in a God, and yet *live as without God in the world*. is worse than being an atheist, so to profess christianity, while its principles have no influence upon us, not improving our dispositions and conduct, is much worse than not to believe it all. A profligate unbeliever is much
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more excusable than a worldly minded immoral christian, a christian destitute of candour and benevolence.

4. Christians surrounded by unbelievers, perhaps without any opportunity of attending public worship, and the received custom of the times excluding the mention of any thing relating to *religion* in conversation, should be careful to confirm and strengthen their own faith by a voluntary attention to the principles and evidences of it. Faith, as Dr. Hartley has shewn, admits of degrees, and between a merely *rational faith*, or the simple assent of the mind to a speculative truth, and *practical faith*, or that cordial reception of it which warms the heart, and influences the conduct, the difference is almost infinite. The former, as it respects christianity, is of very little value, as we see in the generality of christians, who being wholly immersed in the affairs of the world, and giving little or no attention to their christian principles, are little, if at all, the better for them. Nay, they are the more criminal on this account ; being possessed of so great a treasure, and making no proper use of it. The latter only is that faith which the apostle says, *works by love* (Gal. v. 6.) which purifies the heart, and reforms the life ; and it cannot be formed, and kept up, in the actual circumstances of life, without great and unremitting attention.

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A person, therefore, who wishes to be a christian to any good purpose, must make it his daily practice to read the Scriptures, and other books which tend to interest him in their contents. Much of the time that his necessary business, whatever it be, allows for reading, he will, with peculiar satisfaction, devote to *this*; and he will not satisfy himself with saying that, having once read the Scriptures, and well enough remembering their general contents, he has no occasion to look into them any more. The consequence of the frequent reading of the Scriptures, and books relating to christianity, will be, that his religion, or something relating to it, will be the subject to which his thoughts will naturally turn, whenever the business of life does not call them another way; and even in the midst of business he will have many moments of pleasing and serious reflection, which will have a happy effect in preserving that equanimity which is so desirable amidst the vicissitudes of life, preventing undue elation in prosperity, and depression in adversity; from that sense of the wise and impartial providence of God superintending all events, and the happy termination to which all things are tending, which this practice will naturally impress upon his mind.

If a christian have any friends, whose views of things are similar to his own, he will naturally

rally resort to them, and they will strengthen each other's faith, hope, and joy, by conversing on the subject of religion; as persons of the same sentiments and views in politics inflame their ardour in a common cause by frequent intercourse and conversation. I am even not altogether without hope, that this open rejection of christianity by such great numbers, and the contempt with which it is treated by them, will operate like persecution of other kinds, and animate the zeal of its rational and steady friends; and also that this zeal may lead to methods of extending the knowledge of christianity, and its evidences, to others who are but imperfectly acquainted with them, which may end in the *rechristianizing* of the world, and that on principles better founded, and therefore more stable than ever.

But to effect this desirable end, it is necessary that christians make their religion a primary object, and consider every thing relating to this life as subordinate to it; and, if there be a future life, of so much more value than this, they reasonably ought to do so. Let the *children of this world*, as our Saviour calls them, give their whole attention, as they do, to the perishable things of it; but let the *children of light*; the heirs of immortality, habitually look above and beyond it, to that *treasure in heaven which faileth not*, that *inheritance which is incorruptible*,
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undefiled, and which fadeth not away, not indeed, the object of sense, but of faith, and surely reserved in heaven for us.

There is no great danger of leading any person by these representations to make his religion too much an object, so as to neglect the proper business of this life, though with some persons of a peculiarly melancholy turn of mind, and especially after meeting with misfortunes in life, this has been the case. The constant presence of things *seen and temporal* gives them a decided advantage over things *unseen*, though *eternal*, especially in these times, in which all monkish maxims are justly exploded, and in which the duties of all intelligent christians connect them with the world and the business of it; so that we cannot have any serious apprehension of this inconvenience, which, however, it is proper to guard against. Indeed, I cannot conceive that any of those whom I call *rational Christians*, whose religion is free from the gross absurdities that have long prevailed in the christian world, and which have brought it into the state of discredit into which it now is, are in any danger of this extreme; and these are the only persons by whom I have any expectation that an address from *me* will be attended to.

Lastly, let the rational christian, who justly disclaims such doctrines as those of *original sin*, *arbitrary predestination*, the *trinity*, and *vicarious*

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satisfaction, as the grossest corruptions of his religion, and the principal cause of its present rejection (and which on this account his regard for christianity requires that he should take every opportunity of exposing) be equally prepared to meet the bigotry of the defenders of these doctrines (who are at present the great majority of the nominally christian world) persons who will not scruple to treat him as a deist, or atheist; and the hatred of the real deists and atheists of the age. For if he be zealous and active in promoting what he deems to be pure christianity, their sentiments concerning him will not deserve a softer name. However, the malignity of both bigots and unbelievers are alike insignificant, considering the great object we have in view, and they are infinitely overbalanced by the solid satisfaction which arises from the cordial esteem of a small number of judicious christian friends, who will approve of our conduct, and join us in it; to say nothing of the solid satisfaction which arises from the consciousness of a steady and undaunted pursuit of what is *true* and *right*, the hope we entertain of the approbation of our maker, and the glorious rewards of immortality.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX,

No. 1.

An Illustration of what is advanced, p. 18, concerning the Principle of Self Interest.

THOUGH a regard to men's own interest is often the reason why they perform virtuous actions, and consult the good of others, yet a love of others is originally generated in a manner independent of it, and even prior to it, from pleasing sensations in any way connected with other persons. A child becomes attached to its nurse, and to its parents, from the pleasure it receives from them, and also from the remains of pains falling within the limits of pleasure, according to the observations of Dr. Hartley. He is pleased to see them pleased, from his having had most pleasure himself when he perceived them to be so. This gives him in time a habit of endeavouring to please them. But when this affection and habit is once formed, it is so independent of the elements of which it was composed, that few persons have any idea of the process by which it is generated; and in time the desire to make others happy is as confirmed, and influences us as instantaneously, as the desire of self preservation; in so much that many philosophers have supposed it to be an original instinct, natural to

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man, and not generated from any elements after our birth.

This is most evidently the case with brute creatures with respect to their off-spring, and certainly without any attention to their own interest or happiness, of which it is probable they never have any idea, always acting from the influence of immediate impressions, without any thing that we call reflection. Besides, whatever be the cause, parents are more attached to their children than children are to their parents, and with as little view to any advantage they may receive from them; so that whatever private pleasure or satisfaction may have had to do in the formation of this affection, it becomes, and very soon, perfectly disinterested; and therefore the same may be, and no doubt is, the case with respect to general benevolence. If you ask a truly benevolent person *why* he is so, he can no more give any account of it, than he can of the reasons why he loves himself, and the attempt to derive it from the principle of self love, will probably appear to him to be very far fetched and improbable.

Few of the actions of men, even the most selfish, have for their immediate and proper motive a regard to their general interest. If this was the case, they would study it more, and act more rationally and wisely than they do. Their only object is the gratification of some particular propensity,

fity, and that of doing good to others, or the principle of benevolence, when it is once formed, acts as instantaneously, and mechanically, as that of hunger or thirst. At the time, no doubt, it would give a benevolent person more uneasiness to repress his inclination than to indulge it, and therefore he has most satisfaction in acting as he does; but in this sense every action of a man's life may be said to be selfish, and in the nature of things it cannot be otherwise. This is the case not only when men risk, or actually sacrifice, their lives for the good of others, but when they do it from a principle of honour, or the dread of shame. But this is a very different thing from a man's acting with a deliberate view to avoid the pain or procure the pleasure; and if any man can be brought ardently to wish and steadily to pursue, the good of others; without any regard to his private advantage, though he have the highest gratification in this benevolent conduct, it is the most properly disinterested that can even be imagined. The same observation will apply to the principle of obedience to the will of God, and the dictates of conscience. When these become men's immediate motive of action, and they have no satisfaction equal to that of being uniformly governed by them, it is the most perfect virtue, and the highest perfection of character that they can attain to.

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The proper rule of *right* with respect to any institution, or piece of workmanship, is the intention of the author of it. The proper conduct of a boy at school, is to conform to the rules of it, which were laid down by the master, with a view to the improvement of his scholars; and that precise number of wheels in a clock, and that disposition of them, is *right*, which best answers the purpose of the maker of it. For the same reason, therefore, right conduct in men, as beings under the moral government of their maker, is a conformity to his will; it being taken for granted, that his will and object is the happiness of his creatures. A christian being fully persuaded of this, will make this his object, and endeavouring to overlook his individual interest, he will act that part which he conceives his maker, and the good of his fellow creatures requires, though it lead to danger, suffering, and even death.

Every intelligent being will, no doubt, consult his own interest, and make this his ultimate object, when he does not act from any particular impression, but from cool reflection. But the christian has a full persuasion that in his case, it is needless, and even injurious to him; being satisfied that, if he does his duty, he who is a better judge than himself will take the best care of his true interest; and though he abandon every possible

possible advantage in this life, he will find it in another. On the other hand, an unbeliever in a future state must necessarily have his views bounded by *this*, and if he act from his best reason, he will sacrifice every thing to this life, and the enjoyment of it, because it is his *all*. In this case, however, we see what power a sense of shame, a feeling of patriotism, and other principles (which, being once formed, act mechanically) have to carry men to despise danger and death, equal, in many cases, to that of the christian martyrs; but they cannot do it with the same certainty, because in the christian there is no opposition between the dictates of his coolest reflection, and any other approved principle of action, whereas with the unbeliever they are much at variance.

Admitting believers and unbelievers to be governed by the principle of selfinterest (though the most selfish are by no means uniformly so) the man who with a steady eye can contemplate an interest beyond the grave, and sacrifice every interest he has in this world to it, is a character much superior to him whose views do not go beyond it; as much so as the character of a man is superior to that of a child, and for the same reason. He will also more easily enter into other great views, and acquire a greater command of his passions, in which consists the superiority of men to children, and to brutes.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX, No. II.

Mr. Volney's Assertions concerning the Theology of the antient Egyptians, and the Antiquity of the World, examined.

AFTER this work was sent to the press, a learned friend, who has read Mr. *Volney's Ruins* with more attention than I have done, has observed to me, that in several instances his Notes are insufficient for the support of his text. Of this he particularly mentions two examples. After representing men, in their primitive state, as confining their worship to natural objects, he says with an air of triumph, p. 217, 'And you, doctors, we appeal to you. Say, if this be not the unanimous testimony of all the antient monuments.' His authority for this, p. 345, is only a quotation from Eusebius, who quotes a passage from a work of Plutarch, in which this is only said to have been the opinion of *Cheræmon and others*, and this only with respect to the Egyptians. So that this solitary opinion of Cheræmon, who may be called a modern, for he lived in the first century after Christ, stands in the place of *all antient monuments*. What the Egyptians really thought with

with respect to the divinity, is by no means certain, but it is very possible that their worship of animals and other natural objects, arose from their considering them as representing the divine attributes, though afterwards their worship was directed to those objects themselves.

The next instance is of a more serious nature than this. Speaking of the antiquity of the present system, Mr. Volney says, p. 221, that ‘on the authority of the monuments of astronomy itself, it may be referred with certainty to near seventeen thousand years. If we ask to what people this antiquity is to be ascribed, we answer, that these same monuments, supported by uniform traditions, attribute it to the first inhabitants of Egypt.’ Looking for the authority of these monuments of astronomy, and these uniform traditions, I only find, p. 349, ‘that Mr. Dupuis has collected many probable reasons for thinking that formerly the constellation Libra was at the vernal equinox;’ whence he computes that, the precession of the equinox being at the rate of about seventy years to a degree, the present system must be as antient as he represents it. What Mr. Dupuis’s probable reasons for so improbable an opinion are, M. Volney does not inform us. But according to Sir Isaac Newton, who has recited all that he could collect from antient writers on the subject, there

there is no evidence whatever of the vernal equinox having been at any other time than when the sun entered the constellation Aries. Indeed, the necessary consequence of this precession of the equinox, through so many as seven signs, in the very different situation of the stars with respect to the sun, not having been observed before the time of Hipparchus, who, according to Sir Isaac Newton, made his observations about the year of Nabonassar 602, answering to 145 before Christ, is alone a proof that all Mr. Dupuis's *probable reasons* are of no weight; and that the antiquity ascribed to the world in the writings of Moses is far more probable than that of these writers. But if Moses, who is by far the oldest writer extant, had been mistaken in this respect, this circumstance would not affect the truth of his divine mission, and still less that of Jesus.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX, No. III.

Mr. Freret's Account of the Condition of the primitive Christians considered.

MR. Freret, taking advantage of the exaggerated representations of some christian writers, who have rather boasted that the primitive christians were not of the higher classes, but generally poor, maintains (*Examen Critique*, p. 115) ‘that they were universally such poor and abject wretches, as it is always easy to impose upon, and to make to believe the greatest absurdities on the slightest grounds, and without any examination.’ He calls them, p. 116, ‘a mere populace, as credulous as they were incapable of examination;’ whereas it is easy to collect from a variety of circumstances, that this was very far from being the case, and that the primitive christians were in general of that class of people whose testimony is always esteemed to be of the most value; at the same time that they were such as are the least apt to embrace new opinions.

It does not appear that any of the apostles, or of the other immediate followers of Jesus were properly speaking *poor*. Zebedee, the father of James and John had a ship of his own, and

and hired servants, (Mark i. 26.) which they left to follow Jesus. Peter, who had a house at Capernaum, and who together with his brother Andrew were of the same occupation, appear to have been men in similar circumstances. Peter said to Jesus, (Mark x. 28,) *Behold we have left all and followed thee*, which implies that himself, and all the other apostles, in whose names he spoke, could boast of their having had something to leave. John had some connection with the high priest Caiaphas, and had a house of his own in or near Jerusalem, in which he received the mother of Jesus after his crucifixion, (John xix. 27.) Matthew was a publican, or tax gatherer, and must have been rich; since on his becoming a follower of Jesus, he made a *great feast*, (Luke v. 29,) to which he invited not only Jesus and his companions, but likewise his former acquaintance and brethren in office; and surely such men as these would not join themselves to a company of mere beggars. Poor as Jesus and his companions may be said to have been, it appears to have been their custom to give to the poor, for Judas is said to have *kept the bag* (John xii. 6.) for that, as well as other purposes.

Mary Magdalene, and other women who occasionally accompanied Jesus, *ministered to him of their substance*; (Luke viii. 3.) and I hope they will not at this day be despised on account of

of their sex. Mary the sister of Lazarus poured so much precious ointment on the head of Jesus a little before his death, as to excite some murmuring against her on account of her profusion, (John xii. 5.) The funeral of Lazarus was attended in such a manner as proves that the family was opulent. Joseph of Arimathea, who begged the body of Jesus, was a rich man, and in a sepulchre of his, hewn out of a rock, was Jesus buried. His friends had also procured a great quantity of the most costly spices, with which to embalm him. While Jesus lived he could not have appeared in a very contemptible light, even to his enemies; for he and his friends were sometimes invited to the tables of the rich Pharisees. All these are circumstances that do not mark indigence.

Among the very first converts to christianity were Jews from all parts of the known world, (Acts ii. 9.) *Parthians and Medes, Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphilia, Egypt, and Cyrene in Lybia, persons from Rome, Cretes, and Arabians.* And they were only persons of considerable property, who could leave these distant countries and attend the public festivals at Jerusalem. The eunuch, a person of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, (Acts viii. 27.) who had the charge of all her treasure, and who travelled

travelled in a chariot, could not have been poor.

Though many of the primitive christians were poor, others had possessions which they sold for the common benefit. (Acts ii. 45) Barnabas sold an estate which he had in Cyprus, (Acts iv. 36) Among the most early converts were *a great number of priests*, (Acts vi. 7) and these were of the highest class of persons in the country. Paul, who was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, who was employed by the high priests in the persecution of the christians, and who travelled to Damascus for that purpose, must have been a man of some fortune as well as education. Cornelius, the first gentile convert, was a centurion, and highly respectable on every account; and Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus, was a person of still higher rank. The disciples of Antioch were able to send relief to the poor christians at Jerusalem, as they did *by the hands of Barnabas and Saul*, (Acts xi. 29.) Of the gentile converts many must have been opulent; for they sent liberal contributions to Jerusalem for the same purpose. There were christians in the household of Nero, and a near relation of the emperor Domitian, Flavius Clemens, was consul at Rome, and suffered martyrdom at the expiration of his consulship, at the same time that his wife Flavia Domitilla was sent into banishment,

nishment, as was a niece of his of the same name. In the apostolic epistles we find exhortations to the rich as well as the poor, which shews that then, as well as now, there were among christians persons of both classes.

Many of the christian churches, in very early times, long before they had any legal establishment, were exceedingly wealthy, and besides maintaining a large body of clergy, they had funds for the relief of the poor, and other public uses. Pliny complains that the sacrifices to the heathen gods had been almost wholly discontinued in his province of Bithynia, which shews that the persons who had been at that expence, and which must have been very considerable, had become christians. He also says that there were christians of all *ranks* (*omnis ordinis*) as well as of all ages, and of both sexes.*

As to literature, though the generality of the primitive christians cannot be said to have been learned, they were far from being despicable in that respect. Jesus and all the apostles could preach, and dispute out of the scriptures. The books of the New Testament prove at least that several of them could write, and Paul was probably as well educated as any Jew whatever. And contemptuously as it is the custom of mo-

* In Lardner's *Jewish and Heathen testimonies*, the words *omnis ordinis* are omitted in the quotation from Pliny, though the translation is right.

dern unbelievers to treat the Jews, there was no antient nation, I will even venture to say no modern one, in which the arts of reading and writing were so common. Compared with the Jews of that age, the great body of the Greeks, and much more that of the Romans, were barbarians in that respect.

The christian church soon abounded with learned writers. Justin Martyr was a Platonic philosopher, and many of the bishops in the earliest times were writers, though not many of their productions are now extant. In the second century the christian writers greatly outnumbered those of the heathens, and before the time of Constantine, the latter bore but a small proportion to the former. All the heathen world in those times had no men to compare to Origen, or Eusebius, for genius, learning, or assiduity as writers. And we have hardly any account of a private library equal to that of Pamphilus of Cæsarea, who suffered martyrdom in the Dioclesian persecution.

It would be easy to collect many more circumstances in proof of the very great respectability of the primitive christians, whom modern unbelievers affect so much to despise; but these few are sufficient to shew that they were not so despicable as Freret represents them to have been. The generality of the primitive christians were, no doubt, of the illiterate class; but]

but such persons as these all history shews to have always been the last to adopt new opinions or customs, being the most tenacious of those in which they were educated; and therefore their conversion furnishes a better argument for the truth of christianity than that of more speculative persons, who are most apt to innovate. On the whole, it is evident that the primitive christians gave abundant proof of great integrity, openness to conviction, and strength of mind, in abandoning the superstitions in which they were educated; and their fortitude in risking every thing in the profession of what they deemed to be important truth, can never be denied.

Freret also asserts, *ib.* p. 119, that ' christianity owed its principal increase to the violence of the christian emperors,' as if its principal increase had not been prior to their times. What made it safe for Constantine to declare himself a christian in the face of several heathen competitors for the empire, but a very general prepossession in favour of christianity at that time? What made the emperor Maximilian confess, as he virtually did, that it was in vain to attempt the extirpation of christianity by persecution; and when, after this, the tide of power turned to the side of heathenism under Julian, what was it that with all his artifice, he was able to do in support of it?

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Mr. Freret, in his account of the differences of opinion among the ancient sects of christians, on the subject of the gospel history, says of Cerinthus p. 5, that ‘he denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who he pretended was not to rise again but together with other men;’ and for this he quotes the authority of Irenæus and Epiphanius. Conversant as I have been with the writings of those who are usually called *the Fathers*, this assertion appeared to me very extraordinary, and turning to the passages that he quotes, I find that both these writers assert the direct contrary of what he ascribes to them. Irenæus, treating of the opinions of Cerinthus says expressly that he maintained that ‘Jesus suffered and rose again,’ (*Jesum passum esse et resurrexisse*) Lib. i. cap. 25, and Epiphanius says the very same thing, *πειπονδολα τον Ιησυν, η παλιν εγηγερευμενον*, It would have been extraordinary indeed, and greatly favourable to the purpose of infidelity, if any sect of Christians, of the age of the apostles, could be proved to have denied the resurrection of Jesus. But what can we think of a writer who can so shamefully misrepresent the very passages that he particularly refers to? All that Cerinthus and other Gnostics maintained was, that before Jesus suffered, the superangelic Being, who they said was the *Christ*, and had been united to him, left him. But this makes nothing to Mr. Freret’s purpose.

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I might have extended this section to animadvert upon other articles in the works of this celebrated writer. I will venture to say of them in general, what it would be very easy to prove, if necessary, that under the appearance of learned quotation and criticism, they contain nothing of the least importance with respect to which the facts he alleges are not greatly misrepresented, and false conclusions drawn from them; at the same time that other facts, which would shew the true state of things, are kept out of sight. What he advances concerning the condition of the primitive christians and the opinion of Cerinthus is only a specimen of the whole of his *Examen Critique*.

These observations should have been inserted in the section concerning the ignorance and misrepresentations of unbelievers; but I did not intend to take such particular notice of Freret till after that section, and also the Preface, were sent to press.

The End.

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